Guitar MAGAZINE

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ISSUE 389
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THE OTHER SIDE OF

HENDRIX

HOW JIMI WENT BEYOND THE STRAT AND GOT THE BLUES

+

THE STORY OF THE FLYING V FROM SETH LOVER TO DAVE DAVIES

FUTURE SOUNDS
THE WORLD'S LEADING FX BRANDS TELL US WHAT'S NEW FOR 2021

INTERVIEWS
BRAD PAISLEY
FONTAINES DC
JULIEN BAKER

PLAY LIKE
JOE BONAMASSA &
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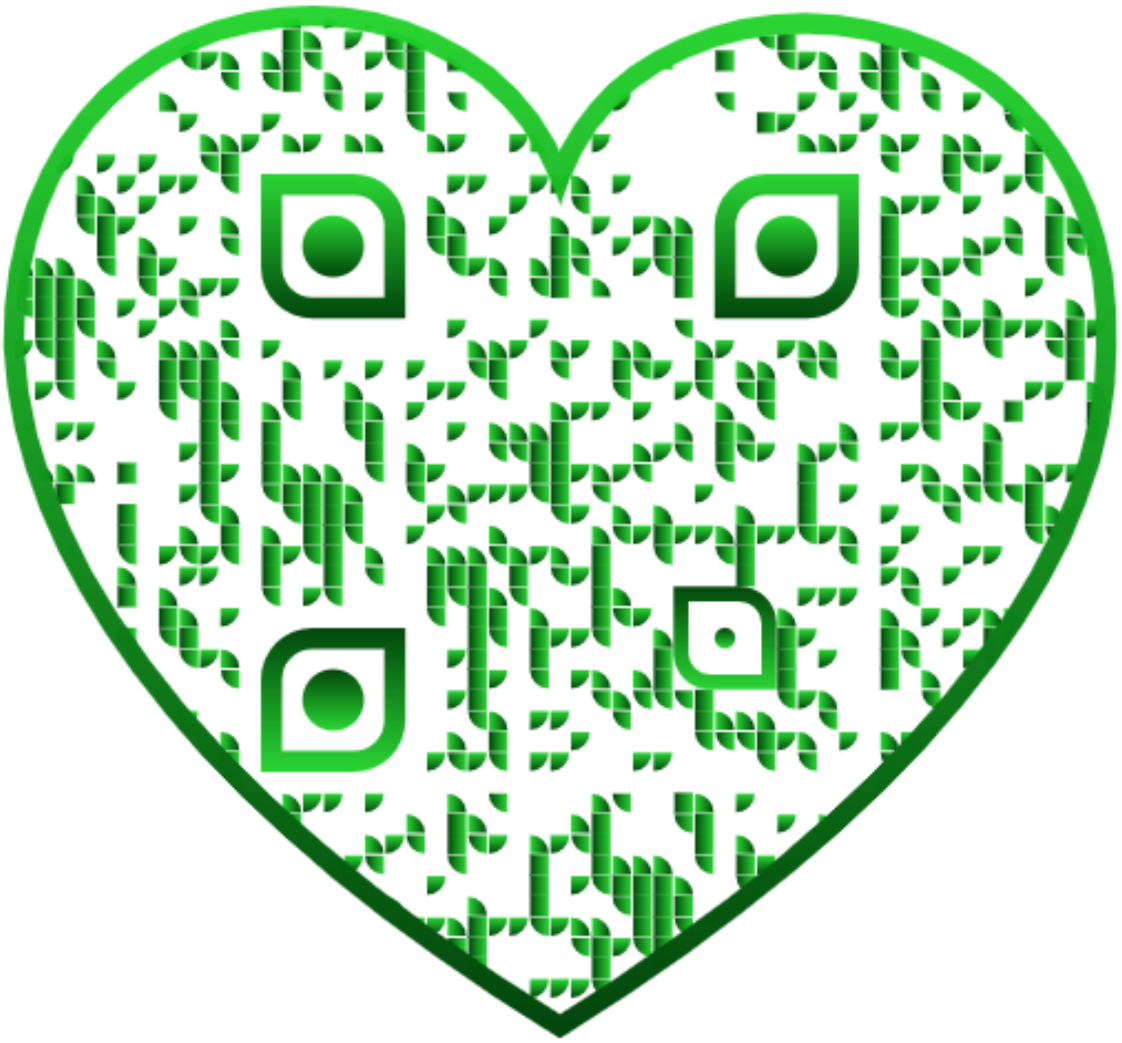

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EDITOR'S LETTER

NEW YEAR'S REVOLUTION

When it comes to guitar heroes, Jimi Hendrix is never far from the conversation. From the moment he stepped off the plane at London Airport in September 1966 – the same year it was rechristened 'Heathrow' – Jimi crammed more experimentation and innovation into his short career than almost any other artist.

This month, as we take a look back at the occasions on which he put his Stratocaster to one side and picked up a Flying V or an SG Custom, Hendrix once again provides timely inspiration. It's a new year, after all – so what are you going to do to get out of those comfortable boxes and breathe new life into your playing in 2021?

One of the most effective ways I've found is to experiment with open tunings. All of a sudden, those reliable old chord shapes don't work anymore, the notes are elsewhere on the fretboard and your guitar sounds very different indeed. It's one of the cheapest and most inspiring ways to voyage into uncharted territories and, more often than not, the absence of the familiar means you're composing immediately. Make sure you have a recording device to hand!

New gear, of course, provides another way to open doors and, this month, we've pulled together a selection of affordable new instruments from the likes of Cort, Jackson and Vintage, alongside an innovative new hybrid from the PRS SE line. For further proof that inspiration needn't cost the earth, head to p72 to find out what your favourite pedal brands have in store for the coming months, as we speak to a panel of movers and shakers in the effects business.

Until next time, then. Don't forget to head to *Guitar.com* for your daily dose of all things guitar and get in touch via email or social media with your tips for six-string self-improvement.

Chris Vinnicombe
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Guitar CONTRIBUTORS

As we salute Gibson Custom's new Jimi Hendrix 1967 SG Custom and 1969 Flying V models, we ask our contributors and team members what guitar they would most like to have seen Jimi play had he lived beyond 1970

MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

MAN WITH A VAN

One half of Seattle shop Mike & Mike's Guitar Bar, a contributor to numerous guitar publications, and a fierce Fender offset advocate, Mike owns about 20 guitars but is still on the hunt for a good 1960s Trini Lopez. In this issue, the tech talker tells us how to shift your gear long distance. "If I had a word of advice for those moving gear across the US, it'd be: don't." If you have to, though, his tips on p134 should set you straight. What would he like to have seen Jimi playing in 2021? "I can see elderly Hendrix with a Gibson Johnny Smith."

TONY BACON

SIX-STRING STALWART

As an author on all things guitar, past and present, Tony realised long ago that he can write about the instrument much better than he can play it. His latest book is *Legendary Guitars*, so we had him write about a few more. Flick to p50 to read Tony on Jimi's six-strings. "The guitars he played were made during a period deemed to mark a dip in quality for Fender and Gibson," he says. "But Jimi didn't do too bad on them." As for what he'd like to see Jimi with today, he says the old ones are the best. "It's hard to ignore the fact that Strats are still available."

DARRAN CHARLES

DENIM-CLAD DREAMER

In the mid-80s, Darran wanted to be a denim-clad rocker with a Kramer Nightfly. The best he could manage was chinos and a bad Strat copy. Today, for his prog-metal act Godsticks, he has all the bases covered, from Fender to PRS. Nevertheless, he approached PRS's Hollowbody SE with trepidation – but ended up inquiring about having the guitar's piezo retrofitted to one of his live guitars. Head to p84 to find out why. For Darran too, Jimi and the Strat are inseparable. "His style symbolises Strat tone," he says. "That never gets old."

CHRIS FANTANA

AMP ARCHITECT

A former session musician and guitar teacher, Chris launched Brackley-based British boutique outfit Rift Amplification in 2013, having spent his teens tinkering with valve gear. Today he's consumed by his EH-185 clone project. "It's becoming my daily driver," he says. "I've got a 1960 Epiphone Century going into the instrument channel!" Flick to p132 for its conclusion. As a firm Firebird fanatic, Fantana has been thinking… "I've recently discovered Jimi's Flying V tones so I have to wonder, could he have made a Firebird sing like that?"

DANIEL SEAH

INDUSTRY NEWSHOUND

Inseparable from his MIJ Fender Jazzmaster and Sunn Beta Lead amp, Singapore-based Malaysian guitarist Daniel has been playing for almost 20 years and counts Jeff Parker, Ichirou Agata and Jan Akkerman among his guitar heroes. When he's not playing with his ear-splitting band YOY, Dan covers all the latest news for *Guitar.com*. He'd like to have seen Jimi apply his skills to all corners of the instrument. "I bet his playing would translate well to an old parlour acoustic," he says. "The other answer would be something modern, like an Abasi Concepts Larada 8."

GARY WALKER

STOMPBOX SOOTHSAYER

Former *Guitar Magazine* managing editor Gary started out 25 years ago on a humble Les Paul copy. These days, he swears allegiance to Gretsch and is now on his second Players Edition Tennessee Rose. Gary would love to have seen Jimi with a big hollowbody Gretsch too. "It's the one area he never got to explore. I can imagine him coaxing some unbelievable sounds from one of the modern Players Editions." This issue, Gary pestered pedal companies to divulge their plans for 2021. Flip to p72 for his divinations.

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FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

BUCKING THE TREND

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, I must confess that the lethargy instilled in me by having to work from home since March has left we with a backlog of magazines to read. That being the case, I've only just caught up on the November 2020 issue, in which I was really intrigued to read about Chris Buck's 1962 Stratocaster find, as I'm also the owner of a player-grade example.

I acquired mine in 1987 from none other than one-time *Guitar Magazine* contributor Phil Harris, who at the time was clearing his stock of refinished Strats. I spent a very pleasant afternoon at Phil's house in South London, playing five early 1960s Strats that he'd laid out for me before picking #82207, a creamy white refinish, for the princely sum of £1,000. Phil was kind about my playing and even took the time to show me an absolutely mint 1957 Strat in the next room, which he said, to my dismay, "plays like a dog".

I gigged my Strat a few times but, being a vintage instrument, it had a number of issues with my high-gain rig of the time, and I instead gravitated to the then recently launched Strat Plus. Many years later, my '62 has been to several different luthiers to sort out playability issues and is still the best-sounding Strat in my stable, which now features two Strat Pluses (1989/1991) and a 1992 SRV Strat.

Chris Buck's 1962 Strat, post-restoration

The Jaded Hearts Club, "the world's most A-list function band"

Like any player-grade instrument, it's far from mint and, during the decade I've owned it, the guitar has received a fair few modifications – but sensible ones I think. I've added 1970s-style bridge saddles (the originals are worn and rusty); a five-way switch (original in the case); a Bare Knuckle replacement at the bridge pickup, and newer vintage tuners (I have the originals). At the more extreme end, the nut is brass and I filled the holes where someone had drilled in a locking nut; there is a massive hacked-out swimming pool rout under the pickguard; most of the screws are not original; we think the neck pickup is original but the middle one is suspect – whatever it is though, it has a wonderful tone and complements the neck perfectly.

Worst of all, however, is the body, which has at some point been sanded before being hand-painted white, giving it a sort of sucked-sweet look. It probably is original but a large crack in it from the upper horn and when you remove the neck (August 1962), there is a big screw going through the crack to hold it together! The neck itself is very slim but has a wonderful dark brown Brazilian 'board, flatter than normal as the frets are more medium gauge – I've had it stoned and they are low but playable.

Your article inspired me to plug my old friend into my new Blackstar JJN2 (bought thanks to another of your reviews) and, guess what – it sounds fabulous! Thank you again for inspiring me to reconnect. I wish Chris Buck many happy years with his find. It may not be all-original but it sounds inspiring. After all, they were made to be played!

TAKIS KOUTSOUMANIS, VIA EMAIL

FANTASY FUNCTION BANDS

Dear *TGM*, I greatly enjoyed your interview with Graham Coxon and co last month [issue 388] and it tickled me to hear you describe The Jaded Hearts Club as "the world's most A-list function band". While you were obviously not being serious, it got me to thinking – if you were putting together a fantasy band to play the hits for a wedding or function, who would be in it? Do you pick the best at their particular style and hope they can adapt or do you go for the most versatile players who can cover a wealth of bases? And what about chemistry? I can't see, say, David Gilmour and Joey Jordison working together stylistically but then they're both great musicians, so maybe they would!

I'm throwing it out to other *Guitar* readers: who would make up your dream all-time all-star function band? For me, the rhythm section is easy: Neal Peart on drums and James Jamerson on bass. I'd have Axl Rose on vocals. But on the guitar side? Well, as it's my band, I want two guitarists, and I racked my brains but struggled to think of a pairing I'd like to see together more than Hendrix and Prince, two hugely versatile and stratospherically talented players who would be able to not only cover every base but would feed off each other's energy in an exciting way. The setlist would probably not be worth the paper it was written on though!

I had a lot of fun putting together this fantasy function band and I wonder if other readers fancy sending in theirs and comparing notes. I'm sure everyone's will be different. That's part of the fun!

PHIL LEWIS, VIA EMAIL

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ONES TO WATCH

ROSIE FRATER-TAYLOR

WORDS SAM ROBERTS

Blending her adventurous songcraft with an impressive jazz education, Rosie Frater-Taylor is quickly becoming one of the UK's most exciting young guitar players. Here, she details her journey from discovering Cubase to her dreams of a Mercury Prize nod

What inspired you to pick up a guitar?

"My mum had this massive book of chords and a couple of guitars around the house, including an old nylon that was *way* too big for me, as well as a Fender copy electric and a beautiful green acoustic with marble bird inlays. She showed me how to play a few open chords and read the diagrams and, soon enough, I was learning as many chords as I could. I have always been surrounded by guitar-led music, such as folk, jazz and fusion. I remember the unique sound of the guitar really resonating with me when I was a kid. I was probably drawn to the very visual element of the instrument at first too."

Tell us about your guitar and pedal setup.

"When playing live, I use my Gibson Les Paul Studio 2019 and my Henriksen JazzAmp 110. I love this pairing and normally it's enough to satisfy me in my own gigs. Sometimes I'll use a selection of pedals if I want a more cutting sound, including the Electro-Harmonix reverb/delay, an overdrive, the Boss OC-3 – the poly option is awesome for solo original sets – and a volume pedal."

You're an undergraduate of London's Royal Academy of Music. How has that influenced your approach to playing guitar?

"Being in the Royal Academy environment and playing with so many great musicians has given me a real drive to up my game, in terms of comping, improvising and so on.

Frater-Taylor with her Gibson Les Paul Studio 2019 in Wine Red

I've had to play a lot of obscure, difficult charts during my time here, which has enabled me to develop an adaptability for most musical situations. It's allowed me to finely tune my vision of myself as an artist by simply introducing me to so much music. You can't be expected to enjoy and gel with everything said and played but I've tried to take the music I like further in my own writing and practice."

Has the London jazz scene helped you develop a more cohesive sound?

"Though I have many friends within the London scene, I don't really consider myself part of the movement because my music is largely vocal and song-based. I draw on the sound of jazz for sure but I try and to look beyond one genre when I'm writing."

You've always been at home in the live environment. How has the pandemic impacted your process?

"This crazy pandemic has given me a much-needed opportunity to focus on new music. I spent the past year writing, producing, recording, planning and finalising all 12 tracks for the next album. Sometimes enforced nothingness can be a good thing. It gives you a chance to let your mind wander a little in order to bring you back to why you're doing what you love in the first place. Of course, I miss performing but I've been fortunate to do a lot of it over the past few years, so my 2020 experience feels more like a gain than a loss."

Your debut album *On My Mind* received widespread acclaim. How have you followed that on *Bloom*?

"The objective for the new album is to get it into as many ears as possible. Both the recording and release process for *On My Mind* was wholly DIY, including the mix, mastering, recording and so on. Some of those tracks happen to be the first-ever projects I worked on after downloading Cubase onto my old PC. This tends to surprise people, which I suppose is quite flattering!

"The process for *Bloom*, other than having graduated to Pro Tools, is an elevated version of this. I'm still producing, writing and recording my stuff but I'm outsourcing the mixing and working with my manager. My first project was released on a whim with the purpose of getting my sound out into the world but *Bloom* is more intentionally planned and has had many hours of work put into it already."

What song stands out the most on *Bloom*?

"It's difficult to choose just one, being so attached to this project right now. But the track I'm most proud of sonically and from a songwriting perspective is the next single, *Think About You*. Keep your ears out!"

You've been regarded as a folk-jazz crossover artist. What's do you think about that description and how do you adapt both genres to fit your music?

"It's a pretty apt description of my sound if I'm being honest. Both the folk and jazz genres are really big ones for me. There's Joni Mitchell, Olivia Chaney and Becca Stevens on the folk side and then there's the likes of Pat Metheny, George Benson and Lionel Loueke on the jazz side. I feel that the new album contains elements of pop, soul and R 'n' B on top of the more obvious jazz-folk vibes but generally the folk-jazz-crossover description doesn't offend me. I think listeners tend to come to that jazz-folk conclusion when they first check me out because my songs are very guitar-based – they're triadic and open, harmony-wise, with the addition of the jazzier style of soloing that I've developed. Perhaps my voice has something to do with it too… I'm just a lover of both of those sounds, harmonically, melodically and rhythmically!"

Where do you see yourself in 10 years' time?

"In 10 years, I'll be 31. I have no idea where I'll be. It's dependent on so many factors and, with the world in such an interesting place, it's hard to plan much more than a year into the future. I won't ever stop writing, performing or sending my music out into the world but I would like to have some degree of a 'normal life' and family, etc. I guess a world tour, a couple of Grammys and a Mercury Prize would be nice though."

Finally, tell us something interesting about yourself that has nothing to do with guitar.

"I've got an A* philosophy A-level up my sleeve; I love a good philosophical conversation over wine or tea!"

Rosie Frater-Taylor's latest single *Better Days* is out now on i2i Music

THE PLAYLIST

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

LONELY THE BRAVE
THE HOPE LIST

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

On their first LP since 2017, the Brit rockers dig into their early influences and find solace in their music's melancholic optimism

Last year was a tumultuous time for everyone. Lonely The Brave felt it more keenly than most bands, as drummer Gavin Edgely and bassist Andrew Bushen are frontline NHS workers by day. Since their last album *Diamond Days*, the band has also parted ways with original signer David Jakes, drafted in new frontman Jack Bennett, and found a new record label. Through it all, guitarist Mark Trotter focused on songwriting, and the band have *The Hope List* to show for it. Completed despite the band being locked down in different parts of the country, it sees them exploring the light and dark side of their oeuvre, vintage guitars in hand. Here, Trotter picks out his favourite guitar parts.

KEEPER

"This was the first song we wrote for the new record. It was one of those tracks that just seemed to appear – where you don't fight it, you just let it go where it wants. From my perspective, when it came to recording, I was after a Daniel Kessler feel for the verse – a Fender, clean with some reverb, always works so well with single-note sections to really cut through. I used my John English Esquire through Jack's early 1970s Twin, with a blend of close mics and room/hallway ambience mics for some depth. The chorus was my '77 Tele Deluxe running into a Weinbrock head and handwired Marshall 4x12 with my Empress Superdelay. The Tele's wide-range humbuckers are superb. They offer such note definition and work really well with the Weinbrock, which is essentially a JCM800-type circuit. I wanted a shoegaze feel through the choruses to call back to the kind of tracks that we grew up with. The middle eight was again my Esquire, with a bit more delay through the Twin."

BOUND

"This track was important, as it was the turning point for me feeling positive about my ability to still write music. I had the verse and the chorus down and was hearing this really straight drumbeat playing through and not really reacting to the guitar, only linking back when each verse section looped around. I was walking around with it in my head for weeks driving myself a bit bonkers, so it was a release to finally get to the studio with the guys and get it all out of my system. I always had the middle eight launching in from an E minor but couldn't really decide where to go with it. Fortunately, once everyone jumped in, the track took itself where it needed to go. I love this track because it represents where my headspace was when writing it. I was in a pretty bleak position but, as with all of our music, the element of hope is there too. The choruses themselves were a combination of my 1970 LP Custom through the Weinbrock and Marshall 4x12 setup, and also some Kemper profiles with my '59 Les Paul Junior. This was the first time I have recorded with a Kemper and, I have to say, as a studio tool, it's phenomenal. You have to be careful not to disappear down the rabbit hole though!"

THE HARROW

"When we started the band, I aspired to us being a post-rock band with a great singer. I love the imagery that post-rock and film scores create, and this is how I approach writing. If it can stand up alone, without a vocal, then it should climb even higher once the vocalist adds the melody and lyrics. This track is a perfect demonstration of that. It's cinematic, wide and has depth, and Jack's performance pushes it straight up and over the edge. It's probably my favourite track on the record. It doesn't give the listener any respite at all. I love that! My verse guitars were my LP Custom with heavy reverb and delays to provide the swell effects. The rest of the track is pretty much every other guitar Ross [Smithwick, rhythm guitar] and I own through everything!"

YOUR HEAVY HEART

"I remember Ross playing the main guitar part of this track and falling in love with it straight away. It's got the perfect balance of melancholy and optimism. I also love how beautifully understated Ross's playing is on this track. He is a master of knowing when not to play. Ross recorded the main guitar part with his Gretsch Duo Jet into a Marshall 1974 combo, close mic'd. I love how plummy and intimate his take sounds. With my parts, I only wanted to embellish Ross's playing – the lead line towards the end of the track was my main contribution. I believe that was my LP Custom through the Twin. Ross and I then layered a few guitars through various combinations of amps for the finale of the song."

***The Hope List* is out January 22 on Easy Life Records**

© Carla Mundy 2020

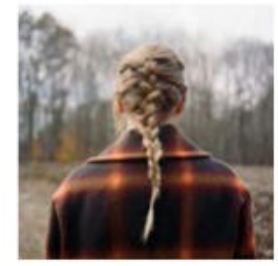
This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers

BLOSSOMS
Pure Pop

Released as part of the extended version of *Foolish Loving Spaces*, this track's opening arpeggiated riff is rhythmic and psychedelic. It's good enough to have been included on the album proper.

SHAME
Snow Day

With album two en route, the second single proves why this band are destined to be a vital act in the British post-punk revival. The paper-thin guitar riff acts as a perfect counterbalance to the sombre vocals.



TAYLOR SWIFT (FT THE NATIONAL)
Coney Island

Swift worked with The National's Aaron Dessner for surprise album *Folklore*. For this track from new LP *Evermore*, she called the whole band, with Aaron and brother Bryce adding their hallmark interlacing guitars.

ARCTIC MONKEYS
R U Mine? Live at The Royal Albert Hall

The Sheffield titans' emphatic return to the stage raised £250,000 for War Child UK last year. The closing track from this charity live album is a reminder of why it remains one of the best rock songs of the 21st century.

GRETA VAN FLEET
Age of Machine

This seven-minute single, which announces the US classic rockers' second LP *The Battle at Garden's Gate*, ensures that the Led Zep comparisons are going nowhere, but with such sultry overdriven SG tones, who cares?

KENNYHOOPLA (FT TRAVIS BARKER)
Estella

With his collaboration with Travis Barker, it's clear that KennyHoopla is driving the rock genre in a promising direction, all while staring down the barrel of early noughties punk nostalgia.

KING GIZZARD & THE LIZARD WIZARD
Intrasport

Doubling down on their use of microtonal guitars, Gizzard return with an eccentric new single that sees them turn on their heels and head in the heady direction of psych-dance. It's wild but it works.

WILLIE J HEALEY
Merry Christmas

With all the pomp and confidence of his sophomore album *Twin Heavy*, Healey's Christmas single is uplifting and melancholic, and littered with sleigh bells, harmonies and silver-sounding acoustic guitar.

MATT BERNINGER
I'm Waiting For The Man (Live on Jimmy Fallon)

Ignoring his promo duties for his latest LP on this talkshow appearance, Berninger instead played this Velvet Underground classic, with trudging piano and guitar overdriven and encased in reverb.

ST BARBE
Sunfish

The debut single from jazz prodigy James Maltby's instrumental trio, *Sunfish* began as a live recording before lockdown forced the band into remote recording techniques, resulting in "freedom with a template".

THE DIRTY NIL
Blunt Force Concussion

The Canadian three-piece plan to unleash their third LP *Fuck Art* soon, and this track confirms that their ability to meld anthemic punk hooks with searing metal riffs has been honed even further this time around.

RUN THE JEWELS (FT ROYAL BLOOD)
The Ground Below (Royal Jewels Mix)

Like a throwback to the days when rap and hard rock were common bedfellows, Mike Kerr's fuzzy bass riff adds a new dimension to this remix of one of the standout tracks from the US rappers' acclaimed 2020 LP.

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A rock 'n' roll stalwart, the Epiphone Casino has graced many a stage over the years and has been a firm favourite of guitar legends the world over for six decades. Seen in the arms of such greats as Paul McCartney, John Lennon, Keith Richards, Howlin' Wolf and scores of others, it's easy to understand why the Casino has such a broad church of devoted fans.

For 2021, the iconic guitar has been refreshed with new worn finishes – and we're giving one away in ludicrously cool Worn Blue Denim. Featuring a layered maple hollow body, two dogear P–90s and a mahogany neck with a 1960s C-shaped profile, alongside modern appointments such as a GraphTech nut and Tune-O-Matic bridge, you're sure to be the toppermost of the poppermost with this six-string over your shoulder. To enter, head to Guitar.com and answer the following question. Good luck!

When was the Epiphone Casino first launched?

A) 1961
B) 1965
C) 1969

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PEAK PERFORMANCE

Long before he was a professional guitarist, Jordi Mestre was in love with the mountains. In 2020, he combined his greatest passions to create Soul Mountain, a unique multimedia project that saw him strap his guitar and amp on his back, and scale the Tuc de Mulleres – a 3010 metre peak in the Catalan Pyrenees

WORDS JOSH GARDNER
PICTURES JORDI RULLÓ

ABOVE Jordi Mestre (left) and guide Roger López trekking up Catalonia's Tuc de Mulleres

Upon reaching the more than 3,000 metre summit of the Tuc de Mulleres, with his hands cramping up with cold and the sound from his amp twisted by the altitude and vast open space into which he was playing, Jordi Mestre recorded a piece of music inspired by his stunning surroundings. Then he came back down and made plans to do it all over again. We spoke to the Catalan adventurer to discover what exactly inspired him to take on this most unique of recording projects. We also find out about the playing challenges involved in executing it safely, the gear he used, and what it feels like to make music against one of the most stunning backdrops on the planet.

Soul Mountain is such a special project. How did you first come up with the idea?

"It's easy to explain but it was difficult to realise – and I just love that. I was really looking for a way to make a project that defined me perfectly and I finally found it by mixing my two passions: music and mountains. Soul Mountain is the interaction of two disciplines that, at first sight, might not seem related at all but, for me, they have always been closely connected.

"The search for a way to unite these two passions is what brought me to create a project that allows me to play and record my compositions on top of my favourite summits at different times of the year, while capturing the whole process on video in order to mix the sounds with he breathtaking images that bear witness to it."

Presumably you were an experienced climber before all this?

"I am a musician by profession but, since I was a kid, I've always spent my vacations in the mountains. My father is in love with the mountains and he passed that love on to me. As I grew older, I experimented with and learnt different sports and disciplines, and I have been skiing and mountaineering since I was five years old.

"The idea for the project originated a long time ago, while I was on one of my 10-day hiking trips. I took a ukulele to play on top of the peaks and, later, I just thought, 'Why not an electric guitar? What will that experience be like?' I did some research and saw that no-one had done anything like that. Well, after my first experience, I already know what it's like: it's so freaking difficult – don't try it! No, really, it's truly fantastic."

Playing on top of the mountain must be a singular experience.
“It’s absolute freedom. Feeling small and feeling that we are nothing in this world. The mountains put us where we belong and put us in awe of the wildest nature. The silence.”

You used a Yamaha Pacifica Mike Stern model for your first recording, *Behind The Steps*. Why this guitar?
“I’m mostly a jazz and soul guitarist, and so most of the guitars I own are old archtops and semi-hollows, which are too heavy and delicate to carry up a mountain. The Mike Stern signature is the only solidbody guitar I own that was fit for the job: it’s a super-comfortable and versatile guitar to play, both essential aspects for me. It has Seymour Duncan pickups that give me the sound I’m looking for too.”

What other gear do you take with you?
“I carry a 10-watt Yamaha THR amplifier. It runs on batteries and gives me more than acceptable sound quality. We also use a Sennheiser 609 microphone, a passive Radial DI and a Zoom H4n pro recorder. Roger [López, Jordi’s mountain guide] helps me carry some of the gear, the rest I keep in my Mono bag and guitar case.”

We hear that you have a custom gigbag in the works that will enable you to do more challenging climbs in future.
“In truth, the regular Mono case doesn’t need many modifications, because they’re already the best cases to carry instruments safely in extreme conditions. But I’ve requested one with a few extra straps with which to tie it around my waist, like a mountain backpack. This will help it adapt to my movements while I’m climbing and skiing, while also allowing me to better distribute the weight between my shoulders and waist. Thanks to these mods, I will be able to go through more technical and alpine ascents in future.”

Carrying all that gear up the mountain must make things a lot more tricky for you.
“Climbing with so much weight and with such a large backpack means you have to be really careful. Some movements that are done regularly without too much trouble become difficult with the guitar and gear on my back. Roger keeps an eye on us at all times. He doesn’t carry as much gear as Jordi [Rulló, cameraman] and I, in order to be able to react quickly in case of trouble. We try to anticipate risks and climb up as safely as possible but the mountains can often be unpredictable, even more so with snowy conditions.

ABOVE LEFT López (left), Mestre (centre) and cameraman Jordi Rulló beginning their ascent

ABOVE RIGHT Mestre and López trekking past one of the range’s glacial lakes

ABOVE Veteran skier Mestre trusts in his Mono gigbag to keep his guitar safe

We try to follow all the right steps in order to minimise the likelihood of accidents occurring.

“Luckily, we had no falls or loss of material last time. The guitar case got some impacts when we were walking through the woods and, at some point, I scratched it against a rock. But it resisted well. When we were skiing down the mountain, I was really gentle and careful, and the guitar was fine at the other end.”

What do Jordi and Roger bring to the project?

“Soul Mountain is a team. Without them, none of this would be possible. Jordi is the cameraman, producer and editor of the video. He deserves a lot of credit for going up the mountain with all the recording gear on his back, as well as capturing these beautiful images and creating that perfect interaction between them and the music. His vision is unique.

“Roger watches over our safety. He is one of the best climbers I know and knows how to choose the perfect day to go out to record. He obviously knows the mountain better than anyone and advises us where we can get the best pictures.

“Both Jordi and Roger believe in the project and have helped me a lot. I’m really lucky to be accompanied by great professionals.”

Behind The Steps **was inspired by the Tuc de Mulleres. Did you compose it beforehand or did you improvise it on the mountain?**

“As a jazz musician, I really love improvisation. But there is no room for it at the peak of a mountain, as the weather conditions are really harsh up there. I composed the song in advance, thinking about the ascent and the images we wanted to capture. Perhaps, in the future, when we’ve done this a couple more times and have become more accustomed to these conditions, we might record songs that are more open to improvisation.”

How challenging is it physically to play guitar in those conditions?

“The sensations up there at 3,000 metres-plus are completely new. There is no resonance anywhere, as we are at the highest point for kilometres around us. The sound just leaves and does not return, which feels really weird. I had a hard time getting used to it.

“The summit was covered in snow too – it was almost up to my knees. It was hard to find a spot where I could rest and play comfortably. I was tired from carrying all the gear and had to stand up to play, which made the weight of the guitar bother me. The chords I played were complicated too. I had to stretch my fingers, which was almost painful up there.”

ABOVE Mestre played a Mike Stern signature Yamaha Pacifica on this high-altitude trip

It must be vitally important to choose the right conditions during which to make your ascent.

"This is the biggest challenge: the weather conditions must be favourable otherwise it just can't be done at all. I can't play with a temperature below -1°C at the summit and we can't have any wind. We have to constantly be on the lookout for weather conditions, so as to pick the perfect day in order to play at the top. We were very lucky that we had perfect weather on the first recording day and it wasn't too cold. My hands responded relatively well in those conditions but, then, that was late May – almost summer. The next filming session will be in winter, so we'll see how that goes!"

Where are you planning to climb next?

"We are considering two options at the moment, both of which are very exciting and a bit more technically challenging than the first climb, the Tuc de Mulleres. Punta Alta de Comalesbienes (3014m) – which is in the Lleida area of the Pyrenees too – is a significantly rocky peak with narrow sections that have deep drops on both sides. It is very exciting to ski down this one, as it has steep slopes and tight descent lines between its rocks.

"The other one is Montarto in the Val d'Aran. This is one of the first peaks I ever climbed, back when I was six years old. We are planning to go up through an exposed edge using ropes, which will give us spectacular pictures. Some of the descent will be done rappelling down to reach the north face, followed by a very technical skiing section.

It feels like you're definitely trying to push yourself in terms of the difficulty of what you're doing. What is your ultimate vision for Soul Mountain?

"We want to grow and learn with each recording, ultimately taking these ascents beyond borders. We'd like to visit the Alps, go to the United States, perhaps even to the Himalayas – who knows? At the moment, we're focusing on the next recording – and then the one after that.

"To me, this is a lifelong project. I never want to stop doing it. Ever since I was a young kid, I've never put any boundaries to my dreams. I just hope to bring a little more beauty and awareness into this complicated world, with my contribution in favour of nature and culture."

To find out more about Soul Mountain, visit soulmountain.cat

Vibro King

GUITAR MAN

Country music superstar Brad Paisley has a new signature Fender guitar – an Esquire with a secret weapon. Here, we catch up with him to talk tone, finding beauty in corners and why there's something very special about a black sparkle finish

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS
PHOTOGRAPHY FENDER

If you wanted to read a list of Brad Paisley's many achievements, honours and awards one by one, you'd probably be here all day. So allow us to summarise. Across a two-decade career, the country singer-songwriter has shifted more than 11 million records, as well as set the record for the most consecutive No.1 singles on the Billboard country chart (10, if you're counting). He's won enough Grammys, CMA and ACM awards to sink a fairly substantial boat, has written songs for Disney movies, and turned up on TV shows as diverse as *South Park* and *The Voice*. Oh, and he also happens to be a bona fide strap-in-and-hold-on-tight monster of a guitar player.

If you're not yet aware of what we mean, stop reading this and give Paisley's 2009 Grammy-winning instrumental C*luster Pluck* a spin and feel your jaw drop as the West Virginian goes toe to toe with a laundry list of country guitar icons, including James Burton, Albert Lee, Vince Gill and Brent Mason, across three-and-a-half frenetic minutes of fret-melting brilliance.

Given all that, it was no surprise that back in 2017, Fender honoured Paisley with a signature Telecaster. But what was surprising was that the Silver Sparkle guitar was made in Mexico, and offered serious twang for a very reasonable amount of bucks.

"The silver Tele was done really well and I'm proud of it," says Paisley. "Especially given the price, I think it's a life-long professional instrument that offers great value. It's worth way more than they're charging – and that's exactly what I was hoping for!"

Three years later, however, the time has come for a follow-up and, while it would have been easy enough to offer what was a hugely popular guitar in another, more generic finish, Paisley was determined to do something a little more unusual. Say hello to the Brad Paisley Esquire.

"You know, it's common, when an artist has a signature model, for more options to be offered down the line – custom colours and so on," says Brad.

"But when Fender asked if I wanted to do a brand-new variation on the model, I really wanted it to be something that would go *with* the existing guitar, not *instead of*. So I asked Fender if we could do a guitar with a different personality. If you love the silver Tele, then the black Esquire should be the perfect guitar to accompany it."

CHOPPING BLOCK

The Esquire and the Telecaster are, of course, very similar instruments. But Leo's first solidbody has a certain something even beyond the blue-collar workhorse nature of its twin-pickup little brother. As a lifetime Telecaster devotee, that's something Brad is well aware of, especially in the context of the wider Fender family.

"The thing about the Tele is that it's a cutting board with a neck," says Brad, matter of factly. "You can literally turn the thing over and chop up chicken on the back of it with no ill effects! It's an unforgiving guitar.

"The Stratocaster has such a wonderful, sensuous shape and its contours hug your body and caress you – it really is a masterpiece of ergonomics. With the Telecaster, however, everywhere your arm goes, there's a corner, and wherever your hand goes, there are those screws that stick up. On the 1960s models, some of the bridges still have sharp edges, and the neck just bolts on and it's kind of square, and that's where I find such beauty in it. The Esquire is on another level altogether. You know all the amazing luxuries of having two pickups, which makes life so beautiful? Well, you can forget that! That's not there any more!"

"I play a lot of Esquires in concert and what I love about that guitar is the purity of the focus of this hunk of wood with that one pickup by the bridge,

"THE SECRET AGENT IS NOT YOUR TYPICAL NECK PICKUP. IT REMINDS ME OF A WELL-SET-UP STRAT WITH THE NECK PICKUP DROPPED AS LOW AS IT WILL GO. IT MAKES THE ESQUIRE FEEL LIKE AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT INSTRUMENT"

Paisley's new signature Black Sparkle Fender Esquire features a secret second Seymour Duncan pickup tucked away under its paisley scratchplate

without that tall pickup with the chrome cap pulling down on the strings by the neck. Even if you're not using it, just having a neck pickup changes the sound of the guitar.

"There's something about the look, the beauty of an Esquire… when you see someone playing one you think, 'Wow, that guy has one pickup to choose from, he's up there without a net!' With this new guitar, you still get that look but you've also got something extra in your tool belt – you're a spy!"

UNDER THE HOOD

The "something extra" that Paisley is referring to is a hidden neck pickup squirrelled away beneath the Esquire's paisley pickguard. Dubbed the Secret Agent, Brad developed it with Seymour Duncan in response to his love of Esquires tripping him up on stage now and then.

"The Esquire is a magical thing," he says. "But there have been times in concert where I haven't planned the setlist quite right, and I've been left wearing an Esquire when there's meant to be an unmistakable neck-pickup thing happening and I haven't been able to do it. Going to the tone cap on an Esquire does not cut it *at all*…

"I'd been busy developing a new pickup with Seymour Duncan called the Secret Agent, which I'd already stuck in a couple of my older Esquires. I went over to the Seymour Duncan factory one day and asked if they had a neck pickup that could be really effective when hidden under the scratchplate of an Esquire. We worked the whole of that day experimenting with windings, magnets and voicing. It was really fun!"

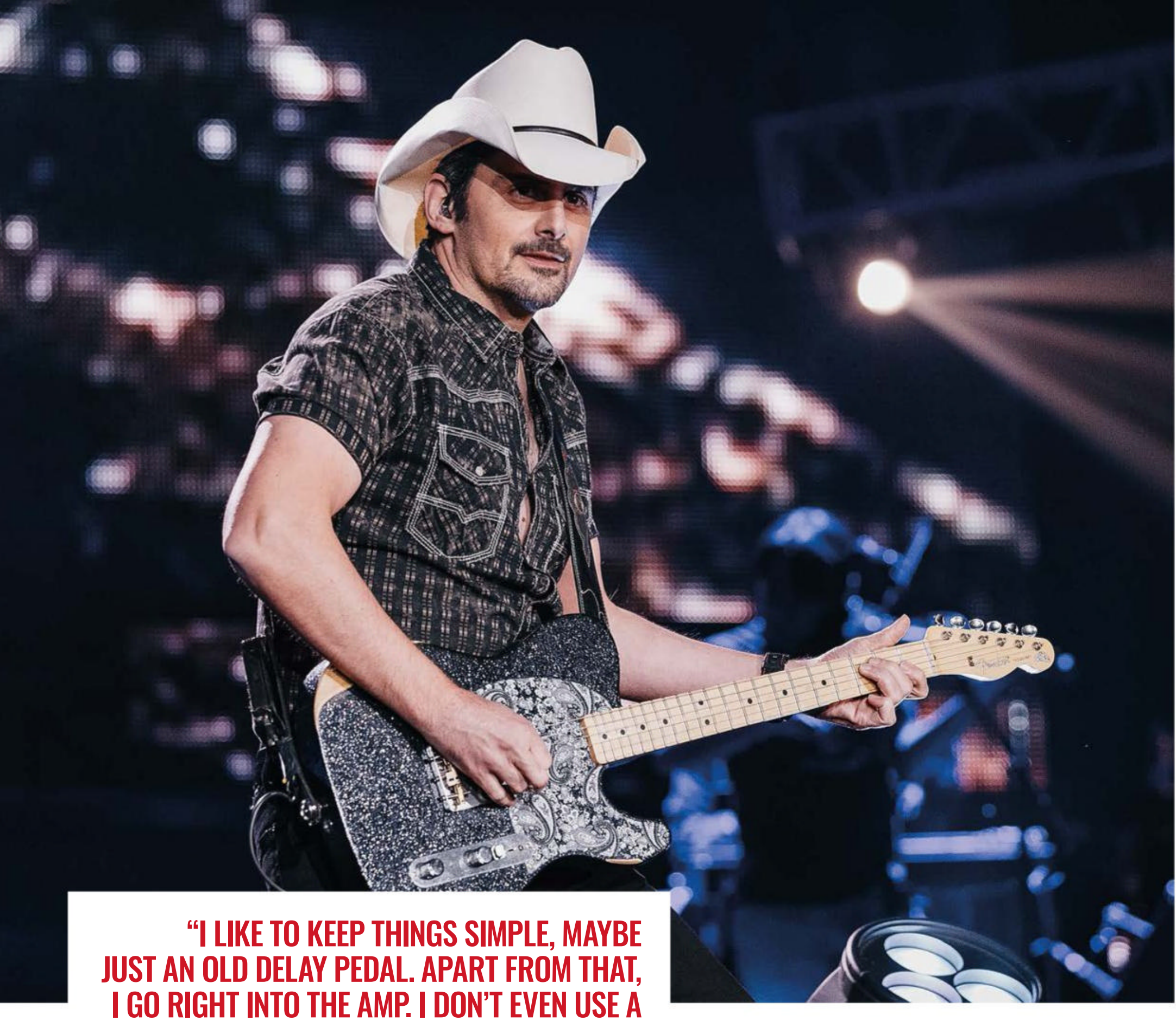
When the time came to make the Paisley Esquire, then, it wasn't difficult to determine that what was good for his vintage guitars would be good for his signature model. Though that doesn't necessarily mean that the Esquire sounds like a Telecaster when you flip to the neck pickup.

"The Secret Agent is not your typical neck pickup," says Brad. "It's a single extra-tall ceramic bar magnet with just the right amount of impedance. It has quite a woody, resonant quality to it because of its distance from the strings. It reminds me of a well-set-up Strat with the neck pickup dropped as low as it will go. It makes the Esquire feel like an entirely different instrument to the Telecaster.

"If you're a player who likes modded Teles with humbuckers in the neck, this is not for you – it's the exact opposite. When I go to the neck pickup on a Tele, I like the volume to go down, not up. With the Secret Agent, there's a drop of about 3-5dB. It's not muffled. There's still enough sparkle that you can do anything with it. It's perfect for that Stevie Ray Vaughan, barely over-driven neck-pickup sound. For me, the neck pickup is about sensitivity and intimacy; I go to that high-output 8k Tele bridge pickup when I want to shout! That's the same pickup that's in the silver Tele and I love it."

With that screaming bridge unit and the polite neck coil, finding a balance in the middle position – and one that resulted in a suitably distinct sonic offering with both pickups engaged – was vital for Brad and the Esquire.

"One of the things I love about the silver Tele is that the neck and bridge pickups were well balanced and, in the middle position, it works well," says Brad.



“I LIKE TO KEEP THINGS SIMPLE, MAYBE JUST AN OLD DELAY PEDAL. APART FROM THAT, I GO RIGHT INTO THE AMP. I DON’T EVEN USE A COMPRESSOR WHEN I PLAY LIVE. IF YOU TURN THE AMP UP ENOUGH, YOU DON’T NEED ONE”

“This is a different thing and it’s cool for different reasons. In the new Esquire, the middle position is like 70/30 – there’s a heavy bridge-pickup presence but you get a more Stratty sound. That makes sense when you consider where the centre of gravity is between the two pickups.”

AGAINST THE GRAIN

One of the most interesting facets of Paisley’s original signature Tele was the woods used in its construction. Rather than alder or ash, the guitar featured a slab of sustainable paulownia sandwiched between a spruce top and back. It’s an unconventional recipe that Fender has retained for the Esquire, since Brad was thrilled with how it came out first time.

“I don’t know where the wood came from but one of the magical things about the first Tele was the way the paulownia and spruce body worked,” he enthuses. “You just can’t find swamp ash now – and especially not in the quantities that we’d need to be consistent. That said, this combination of a paulownia body with a top and back of spruce is reminiscent of a great piece of swamp ash, perfectly cut and dried.”

Guitar players are nothing if not creatures of habit and Paisley understands that making a Tele this way might be off-putting for some. But he insists the proof is in the playing.

“Think of it this way,” he says. “If a friend of yours said to you, ‘Hey, a buddy of mine has a ’53 Tele and it’s six pounds,’ you’d want it. I’d want it. In fact, I wouldn’t even have to play it! I’d be like, ‘Yeah, I want that! If he’s selling it, let me know!’ We all know those are the guitars that have the magic – they resonate, they’re full of music. In this case, Fender has captured that same magical formula with this combination of wood. It works beautifully on this Esquire just as it did with the silver Tele.”

THE DOCTOR IS IN

When it comes to plugging his new guitar in and taking it for a spin, 2020 has meant that Brad has been limited to a few smaller scenarios than the baying sold-out stadiums to which he’s become accustomed. He has, however, found some fun new playmates for the Esquire.

© Andrew Chin / Getty Images

"I did a couple of drive-in shows this summer and a livestream or two, and I just recorded a little video with Fender about this new guitar," he says. "For that, I used a great amp by Dr Z. It's a new version of the Z Wreck, called the Z Wreck Jr. It's remarkable. It's an 18-watt version of the original amp. In the video, I'm using that and my favourite amp that Fender ever made, the Vibro King, which I pulled out of storage.

"I took a couple of Vibro Kings that I had and changed the baffle boards to a 12-inch and a 10-inch, and put two Celestion speakers in them. The 10-inch is a Gold and the 12-inch is a Red, which is their new version of the Blue, but it's 30 watts, not 15, so it's woodier and dark. When you put those two in a Vibro King, it's very special."

On the effects side, Brad likes to keep things appropriately stripped-back when he's playing something in the Telecaster family – and the Esquire is no exception.

"I like to keep things simple, maybe just an old delay pedal," he says. "Apart from that, I'm going right into the amp. I don't even use a compressor when I play live. If you turn the amp up loud enough, you don't need one!"

Paisley clearly thinks deeply about the fine details when it comes to gear. As we round off our chat, he's keen to explain the significance of one more thing on his new guitar – something that's often overlooked as a purely aesthetic choice.

"The colour of this guitar is important to me," he says of the Esquire's Black Sparkle finish. "It looks like coal dust and, coming from West Virginia, with its mining history, that's a fascinating and meaningful thing for me. I love the contrast between the silver on Telecaster and the black sparkle on this Esquire. "

For more about the Fender Brad Paisley Esquire, visit fender.com

THE

THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

JULIEN BAKER

Julien Baker's acclaimed 2017 album *Turn Out The Lights* was a masterclass in sparse instrumentation, brutally honest writing and delicate guitar arrangements. Her new album, *Little Oblivions,* is not that at all – it's a bold, ambitious and dense record but with the same gut-punch songwriting at its core. We catch up with the Tennessean to talk self-doubt, pursuing guitar virtuosity to prove a point, chasing 'ugly' sounds, and why spending two hours trying to get your head around a new effects pedal is a valid form of self-care

WORDS JOSH GARDNER
PORTRAITS ALYSSE GAFKJEN

"It's a conundrum, isn't it?" Julien Baker is reflecting on how she chose to approach the follow-up to her critically acclaimed 2017 album *Turn Out The Lights*, a fragile yet unflinching exploration of addiction, faith, sexuality and mental health. Accompanied primarily by her crystalline reverb-drenched Telecaster, Julien's voice features additional depth only from occasional piano, violin and organ. It's a magical, intimate, heartbreaking record but one that created its own issues down the line.

"I didn't want to go back over similar ideas. That's obviously a fear of people who put out small instrumentation records," says Baker from her home in Tennessee, musing on the denser and more layered production on the forthcoming *Little Oblivions*. "If you had been doing something for four years, you'd want to do it differently. I feel like it's always going to be one way or the other, right? It's like Springsteen putting out *Nebraska* or Dylan going electric. People are like, 'What's going on!?' Well, they're just musicians doing something different – but I felt tortured about it!

"I WANTED TO BE THE BEST SOLOIST, IN NO SMALL PART BECAUSE I WAS A GIRL. I WANTED TO SHOW UP TO JAM IN MY BUDDY'S GARAGE AND SHOW THEM THAT I COULD BE GOOD AND BE A GIRL"

"I really wanted to have percussive elements on the record, because I wanted to broaden my sonic palette and find more ways to serve the songs. But at some point, I just stepped outside of these crazy fears and was like, 'But you're not Bob Dylan, though… it doesn't matter! Why are you freaking out about this? Just put drums on the record. Calm down, it's not a huge deal!'"

These expanded options Baker allowed herself add a strikingly different dimension to *Little Oblivions* but this is still very much an intimate, personal record. Aided by trusted engineer and collaborator Calvin Lauber, Baker played all the instruments you hear, even those that put her out of her comfort zone.

"I played all of the drums on the record because I wanted them to have an 'un-drummerly' sound," she says, with a chuckle. "Sometimes when you're less proficient at something, your non-technique-grounded ways of achieving things end up being really interesting."

Even more interesting was how Baker approached her guitar this time around. While the new album is still replete with lush arpeggios, which criss-cross the record, songs such as the title track and *Hard Lines* showcase a rougher and more esoteric side to her guitar experimentation, which adds a wholly different vibe to proceedings.

"I just wanted to make more ugly sounds," she says, "because I felt like, with *Turn Out The Lights*, I was like, 'Everything has to be orchestrated and beautiful', and I missed making those ugly sounds. There's a running joke that I have four reverb pedals on my board and people are always like, 'Why?! No-one can tell!'

"One of the dudes I used to tour with once came up to me after a soundcheck, where I'd been playing around with one of my reverb pedals because it wasn't working properly, and he said, 'I see you up there pressing all those buttons but it sounds the same to me'. I was like, 'Why can no-one hear this but me!?' It's that classic guitar-nerd thing, where you're like, 'But the tone! The tone has to be perfect!'

"So, this time, I thought, 'Why not try to make something interesting with much broader strokes?' So if there's going to be a tremolo on it, it's going to be a square wave, and if there's a distortion, it's going to be a weird squashy fuzz."

PRACTISE IMPERFECT

Baker's precocious talent unsurprisingly led to her finding the guitar quite early on, though not before a few faltering steps in other musical directions.

"My parents had me take piano lessons – in the same way you take kids to soccer practice and all the other stuff to try to find out what they're good at," Baker deadpans. "And I was super-horrible at piano, because I never practised."

As it turned out, it was someone else in her family making an abortive attempt at learning an instrument that actually sparked her love of guitar.

"My dad had a guitar in the house and he was teaching himself how to play," says Baker, "but I would just go and steal it! It's the guitar I still play today, because eventually he was like, 'Here, just take it'. This guitar was about $100 – super-cheap. It's now covered in a whole bunch of skateboard stickers but I still play it live. It works too, because it's kind of like that good/bad thing – that's what I want!"

Baker's desire to pick up her dad's cheap acoustic was fuelled by the accessible energy of pop-punk that captivated her as a young woman. The genre got its hooks into her early but it's led to a few gear-related missteps along the way.

"When I got into 'guitar' music that wasn't my parents' music, I was like, 'Oh my gosh, Green Day! That guy's playing a guitar – I want to play guitar!' I literally have an SG that I got when I was in the seventh grade because I wanted to have Patrick Stump from Fall Out Boy's guitar – and I would not shut up about it. I was like, 'I don't want anything! I don't want food, I don't want you to pay for my college,

I just want that guitar!' And the stupid thing is that, especially for the music I play, I actually hate SGs. Not that I hate the guitar but I hate them for what and how I play – the neck is crazy wide, they're clumsy and dark. I'm like, 'What was I doing?!' I just wanted that guitar."

Pop-punk is not particularly famous for its technically challenging and provocative guitar work but the agreeable genre provided the gateway that allowed Julien to develop into the wonderfully fluid and expressive lead player she is today. The route she took to get there, however, proved more than a little circuitous.

"I just wanted to play powerchords all day long for years," she recalls. "But then I started listening to music by the likes of Fall Out Boy and My Chemical Romance and they all had solos. So then I was like, 'I don't want to play just rhythm guitar'. Suddenly, I wanted to be the best soloist – and in no small part because I was a girl. I wanted to show up to jam in my buddy's garage and show them that I could be good *and* be a girl, as cheesy as that sounds. I was so intimidated by wanting so badly to play music and there being so many dudes involved in it that I was like, 'Watch this!'

"But that affected my guitar playing in a pretty horrible way. With the first band I was in, which ended up becoming The Star Killers [Julien's college-era band, who released the well-received *American Blues* in 2013 before disbanding], there had to be a mixolydian blues solo in every song to let everyone know that I was good, because I was so self-conscious about my playing. I was like, 'The first thing they're going to know is that I am good at guitar'. Why did I do that?! It was so tasteless. But we all go through a phase when we want to shred over everything."

ON THE SLAB

Baker's days of SGs are long behind her now and, it's rare to see her playing an electric guitar that isn't one of her small but beloved stable of Telecaster-style instruments. And though it took her a little while to get there – Julien came to the Tele relatively late – there's no doubt that she's found her guitar for life, albeit following a few adjustments.

"I don't know why I never liked Stratocasters but I never did," she says, speaking on the protracted road from that wide-necked SG to her current squeeze. "I used to say that Strats were one-trick ponies but that's an unfortunate way to look at Stratocasters.

> “I STARTED PLAYING WITH THE EMPRESS ZOIA. IT IS *MATH*, DUDE. I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST AN EFFECTS PEDAL! BUT THEN I WAS ALL OFFENDED AT MYSELF, LIKE, ‘I CAN’T BELIEVE I DON’T UNDERSTAND THIS THING!’”

They’re really cool for a lot of different sounds. But the Telecaster was just the most comfortable thing for me and I really like all of the particular foibles of it.

“It’s funny. I’m looking at the first guitar I ever saved up for while working a part-time job, which was this Ibanez Artcore that – and this is no shade on Ibanez – was the affordable version of the $5,000 Gretsch or the 335 that I wanted. I was looking at that and I was like, ‘Well, I can afford this, it’s semi-hollow and it’s got humbuckers…’

“The craziest thing is that it was double-wide and it fed back infinitely. It was horrible but I was like, ‘I guess this is just my tone now’. There were so many things that I just took for granted. I was like, ‘This is how my guitar’s going to sound and I can’t do anything about it’. I also strung that guitar with nines. Who sets a guitar up with nines?! I have tiny hands but they’re not that tiny!

“Then I played a Telecaster for the first time and it was the intersection of delicate and beautiful but with a little bit of crunch – which is exactly what I want. The reason I’ve stuck with playing Telecasters is that they’re what I’m most comfortable with, and I also have this specific modification in mine that lets me run the pickups in both series and parallel, which sounds so great with the big soapbar Lollar that I’ve got in the neck of the guitar and that I play most of the time. I wanted something that was a little hotter and a little easier to get to break-up than a regular Telecaster neck pickup. I could go on and on about Tele pickup mods.”

PEDAL POWER

Last year was, of course, a year like no other. It created enormous challenges and obstacles for musicians who would have normally spent their time touring. For Baker, who was already off the road making *Little Oblivions*, it’s been more than a year since she was on it. But she’s coped with the enforced time in isolation in a similar way that many of us likely have: by getting extremely nerdy about effects pedals.

“There has been so much change in my life but also global situations imposing these huge changes to my lifestyle,” she says. “But since we finished the record, I’ve been working on a score, and that’s been really interesting to me. I was super into looping and trying to construct all the layers myself but I feel like I didn’t utilise looping and sampling in the way that I perhaps could have. So I got myself a [Chase Bliss] Blooper. Oh my gosh, that thing? It blows my mind!

“Another thing that sent me into a spiral was that I started playing with the Empress Zoia. It is *math*, dude. I thought it was just an effects pedal! It was humbling because I saw the demo and imagined you could build your sound, almost like a sequencer unit but where you have infinite stackable parameters. And you can but that’s, like, one-tenth of what you can do.

ABOVE Baker’s Telecaster has been modded with a Lollar soapbar pickup in the neck

ABOVE Baker with her dad's old acoustic. Picked up for $100 and now plastered with stickers, it's an instrument she keeps close to hand and close to her heart

"I got into this shit where it's like, you have to create the ins and the outs of the signal flow, and if you want it to be a sequencer, you have to pick a wave and then put an oscillator in there. People who do Eurorack stuff would probably hear me talking about this stuff and be like, 'You're a simpleton'. But I'm out here with this guitar pedal and I had no clue how to do stuff.

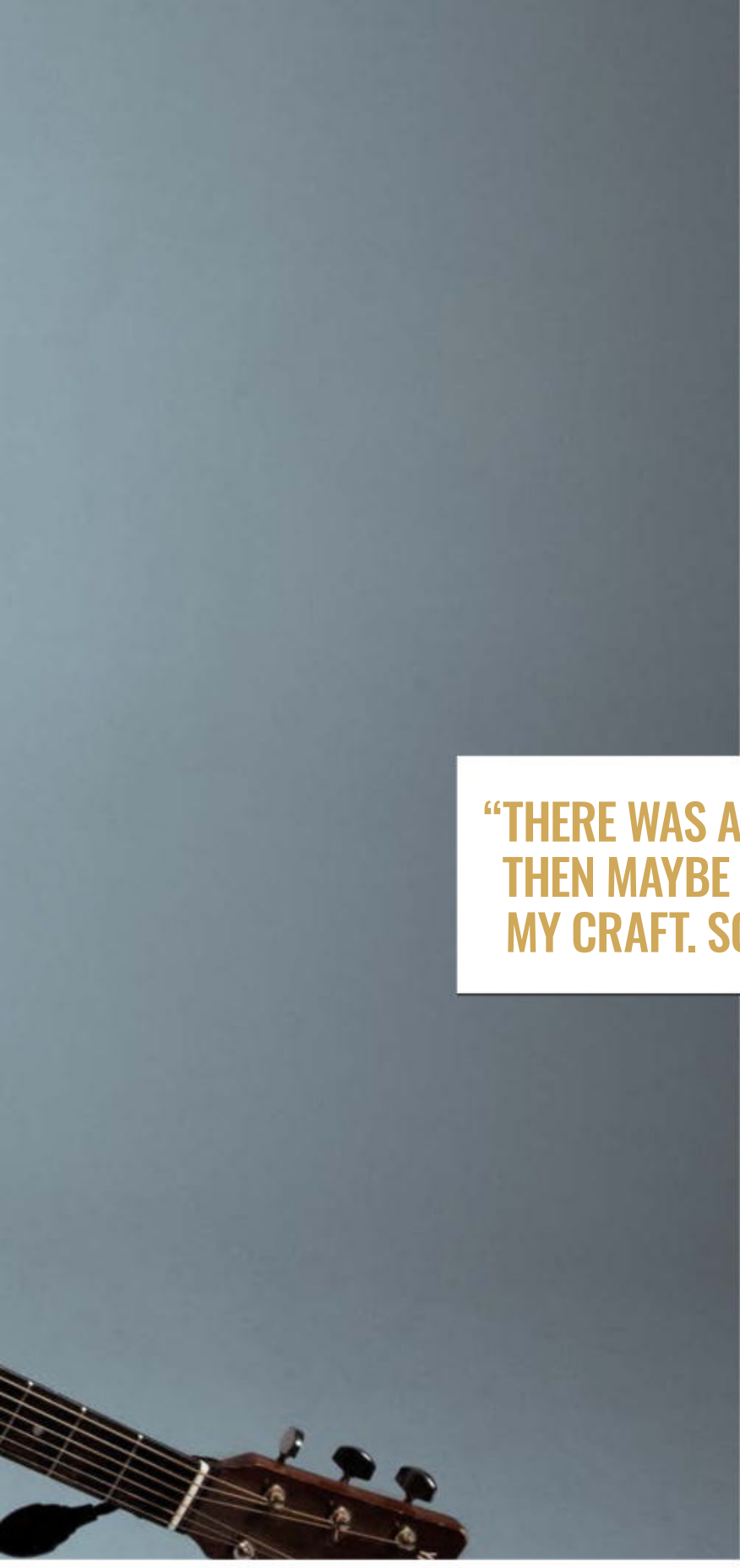
"But then I was all offended at myself, like, 'I can't believe I don't understand this thing'. So I sat there and I watched this three-hour-long Zoia tutorial on YouTube and figured out how to make crazy noises, while also gaining a basic understanding of modular synthesis. It's not a lot but even that was a crazy learning experience for me, because now I'm not pretending to know what attack, decay, release and sustain are. I actually know what those mean now.

"And it's such a minimal return, because I'll spend two hours with this thing and all I'll have done is create this most basic Eurorack sequence that's like, 'Boop, boop, boop-boop'. I show it to my girlfriend and she's like, 'Wow… that was two hours?'"

Two hours spent messing around with a cool new pedal, especially one as complex and versatile as the Zoia, seems like a fun way to spend a day in our book, and the freedom to immerse herself in her craft has been an unexpected upside of a year spent away from others. It's also one that Julien certainly doesn't take for granted.

"It's something I've become so immensely grateful for in all this," she says. "It's a tradeoff maybe, but I woke up at 8am this morning and just practised for two hours, and now I'm going to do interviews for a few hours, and then I'm going to practise until 5pm and try to sculpt the right tones for a live session. It's a privilege that I get to do that. There was a time when I was in college trying to get good grades and I had to get a job because I was broke, and then maybe, in the evening, I would get some time to hone my craft. So it's a huge privilege that music is my job and I feel like if it's going to be my job then it's actually a worthy way to spend my time – I'm going to sit down and change my understanding of how to make sounds by building them out of a controlled voltage signal.

"It's been helpful in that it distracts me from the quarantine. I'm stuck in my house watching while the world is freaking out and I'm like, 'Well, I have this one meaningful activity that I can do'. It's almost like this whole quarantine has been me being obsessed with sound."



SLOW JAMS

The world-altering effects of the pandemic have changed the way many of us relate to the spheres of work and the obligations therein and, as music is her job, COVID-19 has helped Julien re-evaluate how she relates to the art she makes.

"I have been interacting with music in so much less of an obligatory way," she says. "Which isn't to say that it ever feels obligatory but it feels like there was this whole sense of always having to be going, going, going. But then, when your life is halted and the lives of the people around you are halted too, you realise that, 'Oh, I actually do have two hours to spend geeking out about modular synthesis because it makes me feel good – not because it's productive or because I feel like I have to be writing a song or that I have to be creating music because music is my job, but because it feels good'. I'm like, 'I'm just going to sit here and learn this Rufus Wainwright song because the chords are pretty', and that's such a more genuine way to interact with music."

When it comes to interacting with other musicians, there's no doubt that there's something rather special about the bond between Julien and fellow indie-rock leading lights Phoebe Bridgers and Lucy Dacus.

Since they released their critically acclaimed EP as Boygenius back in 2018, the otherworldly chemistry between the three young guitarists has been rekindled on releases from both Bridgers and Dacus, as well as the trio lending their vocals to Paramore frontwoman Hayley Williams' debut solo album *Petals For Armor*. It's no surprise, then, that Bridgers and Dacus turn up on *Favor*, one of *Little Oblivions*' more experimental and ambitious moments.

"THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I WAS IN COLLEGE AND HAD A JOB, AND THEN MAYBE IN THE EVENING I WOULD GET SOME TIME TO HONE MY CRAFT. SO IT'S A HUGE PRIVILEGE THAT MUSIC IS MY JOB"

"It was weird because they both happened to be down here in Nashville," says Baker. "I think Lucy was using the studio to finish up her new record, or one of the singles, and she asked if we would sing on her song. And I was like, 'If you guys sing on my song…' and then I think it was Phoebe who said, 'Can we all sing on each others' songs?!' It was a fun couple of days to come back together after doing that tour together and playing those songs."

The Boygenius EP and its following tour was clearly a moment in time that cemented a valuable bond between these three young and extraordinarily talented musicians, and one that has clearly had a lasting impact on the way all three make music.

"If I'm going to be lame about it, they both have small egos, they're good communicators and they're kind friends," says Julien of what makes the bond between them so important. "Because I did all the songwriting on my records and played all the instruments, I didn't have somebody I could use to gauge how the songs were going, and I hadn't had that since I was in The Star Killers when I was in college and high school. I was like, 'Oh my gosh! Making music just because it's fun and being able to bounce ideas off other people… it's been pretty lonely just writing songs on my own'.

"Now we'll still send each other ideas back and forth for hours and be like, 'What do you think of this?' It's actually made me less precious with my music and my parts. If someone doesn't like my idea, it's not like my world is devastated, it's like, 'Okay I've got a thousand more ideas, let's try as many of them as we can before we fall asleep'.

"I hate to use this word because it's kind of cheesy but it was a very pure experience of music. I get so in my head when I write because it's just me in my bedroom trying to be poetic. It's so nice to have that extra bit of levity in the whole experience and end up sharing that with people."

Little Oblivions is out 26 February on Matador

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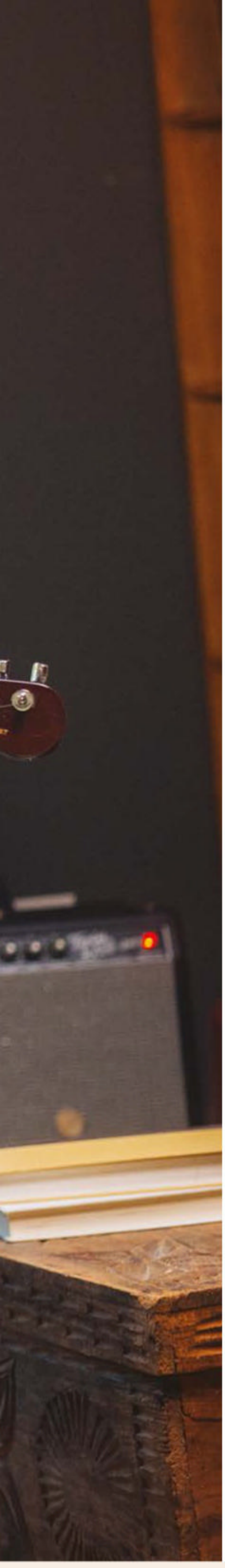

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NO MORE HEROES

It has been a dizzying three years for Fontaines DC, who released their second album *A Hero's Death* in the midst of 2020's fraught summer. The Irish band tell us about their love of 1960s Fenders, what it felt like to sell out Brixton Academy and why they want to write a new album that's "weird as fuck"

WORDS GARY WALKER
LIVE PHOTOGRAPHY FENDER

"WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WE WERE WISHING FOR WHEN WE WERE MOANING ALL OF LAST YEAR. I'D LOVE TO GO BACK AND TORTURE MYSELF AGAIN ON THE ROAD"

The irony of their current predicament is not lost on Fontaines DC guitarist Carlos O'Connell. About a year ago, the band were desperate for a break from touring. Now he's spent months following the release of *A Hero's Death*, the band's outstanding second album, at the end of an endless lockdown summer, climbing the walls of his home in Ireland. Some 3,000 miles west in New York, fellow guitarist Conor Curley has been similarly restless.

© Ellius Grace

“I WENT TO THE GUITAR SHOP AND TOLD THE GUY I LISTENED TO THE RAMONES AND ALL THESE PUNK BANDS I HADN’T REALLY LISTENED TO. HE GAVE ME A CORT 200”

ABOVE Fontaines DC, left to right: Carlos O’Connell, Tom Coll, Grian Chatten, Conor Curley, Conor Deegan III

Sandwiching the release of their adrenal debut album *Dogrel* in April 2019, Fontaines DC had been on the road since the autumn of 2017. The gig itinerary ran into the hundreds, the size of the venues escalating with each lap. They’d toured with Idles, played four times in a weekend at Glastonbury, and nine times in five days at SXSW Festival. The end of the road came a year ago, in February 2020, with a sold-out show at Brixton Academy.

The dizzying whirl of touring was swallowing the band whole: pints of whiskey were sunk before shows; food and sleep became fleeting strangers; relationships were disintegrating. As frontman Grian Chatten put it, “Our souls were kicking back against walls that were closing in.”

As the grey horizon of the Irish Sea called, the remaining dates were cancelled and the quintet retreated to Dublin, taking comfort in what they know best: writing. What emerged was an even better album than their debut – brooding, defiant and immersive, O’Connell and Curley conjuring caliginous surf soundscapes for Chatten’s scabrous baritone to unfurl across. How they’d love to get back in the van and tour it.

We join both guitarists on a transatlantic Zoom call, a well-loved archtop leaning against the bare-brick wall of the New York apartment Curley has shared with his partner since the first lockdown began. O’Connell has spent the morning listening to *Dogrel* and *A Hero’s Death*. When asked how he feels about the latter given the luxury of perspective, he’s unequivocal with his answer. “Proud,” he says. “I love it. I hadn’t listened to *Dogrel* in more than a year and I was like, ‘Fuck, this is good’. When I listened to *A Hero’s Death*, I was like, ‘This is really good’. I never got sick of listening to *A Hero’s Death* when we were making it.”

DIRTY OLD TOWN

The band’s debut album was a stirring portrait of 21st-century Ireland, where all five members of Fontaines DC grew up. O’Connell was born in Madrid, Curley in County Monaghan, bassist Conor Deegan III and drummer Tom Coll in County Mayo and Chatten in Barrow-In-Furness. Both guitarists remember vividly the moment their six-string adventures began.

“I got a classical guitar when I was 10 and it didn’t do much for me,” says O’Connell. “But a couple of years later, I got a cheap fake Strat and that was pretty cool. My first guitar I loved was an Epiphone Les Paul 100. I used to go down to the guitar shop and stare at it in the window with my forehead pressed against the glass.”

Curley’s awakening was more raucous, coming at a school talent show when he was nine. “I was sitting there bored and suddenly there was this absolute fucking explosion of noise. A load of lads came out in dresses and started kicking the shit out of their instruments. This guy skateboarded across the stage.

The only time I'd thought about music before that was listening to *Dirty Old Town* and John Denver with my dad in the car. It was the moment music hit me across the face."

Following that, Curley became a punk – kind of. "I went to the guitar shop and told the guy I listened to the Ramones, the Sex Pistols and all these punk bands I hadn't really listened to," he says. "He gave me a Cort 200. I tried to do that thing where you flip the guitar over your shoulder but it fell on the ground a few times. It was banjaxed. Once I started playing in bands, though, everything just seemed to accelerate."

That pace has never abated. Fontaines DC met at Dublin's British & Irish Modern Music Institute, drawn together by their shared love of poetry. Bonding over Rimbaud, Joyce, Yeats, Ginsberg and Seamus Heaney, they knew "from the start" that Fontaines DC, the name taken from *The Godfather*'s Johnny Fontaine, were going to conquer the world.

"We went out one night and were musing over the idea of starting a band that had the depth of songwriting of The Beatles but the ferociousness of The Clash or the Sex Pistols, an idea that's so common," says Curley, laughing at their youthful precociousness. "But after way too many drinks, we were like, 'No-one's ever thought of this before'."

While Fontaines' songs are driven by a relentless poetic meter, their thrumming two-guitar attack was influenced by two records that defined guitar music in the early 2000s: *Is This It* by The Strokes and The Libertines' *Up The Bracket*. There's a nod to the former in the rhythm guitar of *A Hero's Death*'s thrilling title track, a life-affirming missive centred around the mantra, "Life ain't always empty".

"Those two records were a massive influence at the start," says O'Connell. "Then we started finding our own sound. They were a good gateway. Early on in the band, there were a lot of downstrokes,

ABOVE Conor Curley playing Fender's Lead II as part of the brand's launch 2019 campaign

AMOR
GIRL BAND
1865

© Ellius Grace

ching-ching-ching rock 'n' roll in a modern setting – that was a direct Strokes influence. The Libertines had the rough-around-the-edges thing that attracted us even more. Those two bands are so different in the way they approach guitar: The Strokes are absolutely mechanical and The Libertines are not at all but, somewhere in the middle, was something beautiful."

REJECTING PARADIGMS

Fontaines DC quickly began shaping their own dynamic, one that would earn *Dogrel* a place in the UK Top 10 and a Mercury Prize nomination. Then late last year, *A Hero's Death* received a Grammy nod for Best Rock Album, making them just the seventh Irish act to be recognised by the Academy. It's further endorsment of the pair's decision to reject traditional rhythm and lead paradigms.

"I don't see most of our songs as having lead and rhythm parts," says O'Connell. "The idea is a bit restrictive," adds Curley, "because you're always trying to adhere to it – that was the chorus, the lead player should probably play a lead line now…"

With its evocative poeticism ("The city in its final dress and now a gusty shower wraps the grimy scraps") and wide-eyed proclamations ("My childhood was small but I'm gonna be big"), *Dogrel* was an audacious opening salvo. Here was a band with the chest-beating bluster of Oasis, the fearsome discord of The Fall and all the scruffy romanticism of Arctic Monkeys, yet they could give The Smiths a poetry lesson. On 23 May 2018, Fontaines DC played to 96 people at London's Shacklewell Arms.

"I GOT INTO TREMOLOS AND HOW YOU CAN USE THEM RHYTHMICALLY, SETTING THEM OFF THE DRUMS TO CREATE POLYRHYTHMS"

On 20 February 2020, they played at the sold-out 5,000-capacity Brixton Academy. The vast Alexandra Palace was booked before COVID-19 intervened.

"It's surreal to me now," says O'Connell. "At that time, it felt like a natural progression. But it's been such a short amount of time looking back, now that we've managed to stop for a bit. It blows my mind how much we've done in a couple of years. Before that, we were nothing. We'd tried so hard to get signed and no-one wanted anything to do with us. It's mental. I don't know how it happened."

Locked in the jaws of that seemingly endless tour, the band grasped every spare second to write their sophomore album. "We were motivated by the fact that we were getting sick of playing the same songs," says O'Connell. "We'd been playing *Dogrel* songs for two, maybe three years, and it was adding to how run-down we were feeling."

Upon the release of *A Hero's Death* – which takes its name from a line in Brendan Behan's 1958 play *The Hostage* – there was a sense of the band rejecting the expectations that had been hoisted onto their shoulders. The album's title playfully suggested a desire to pull down their own edifice. Chatten said he wanted to shock the band's audience. "If people don't like it, their band is gone," he declared, unflinchingly. On the seething opening track, its clanging gothic riff referencing The Stooges and Interpol, he says, "I don't belong to anyone".

FACING PAGE Carlos O'Connell on stage with Fender's Lead II reissue

"It was a way of reappropriating our own music," says O'Connell. "The change from being a band that nobody knows to a band that people do know is weird. Something that was your secret, when everyone knows about it, you take it for granted. We needed to claim it back and start writing from our own perspective, outside the public gaze.

"When we wrote the first record, it was the music we wanted to hear. The fact someone is listening and expects something shouldn't change that –that's when it becomes boring. Even though people might think they want the same thing they've listened to already, they don't. No-one wants that."

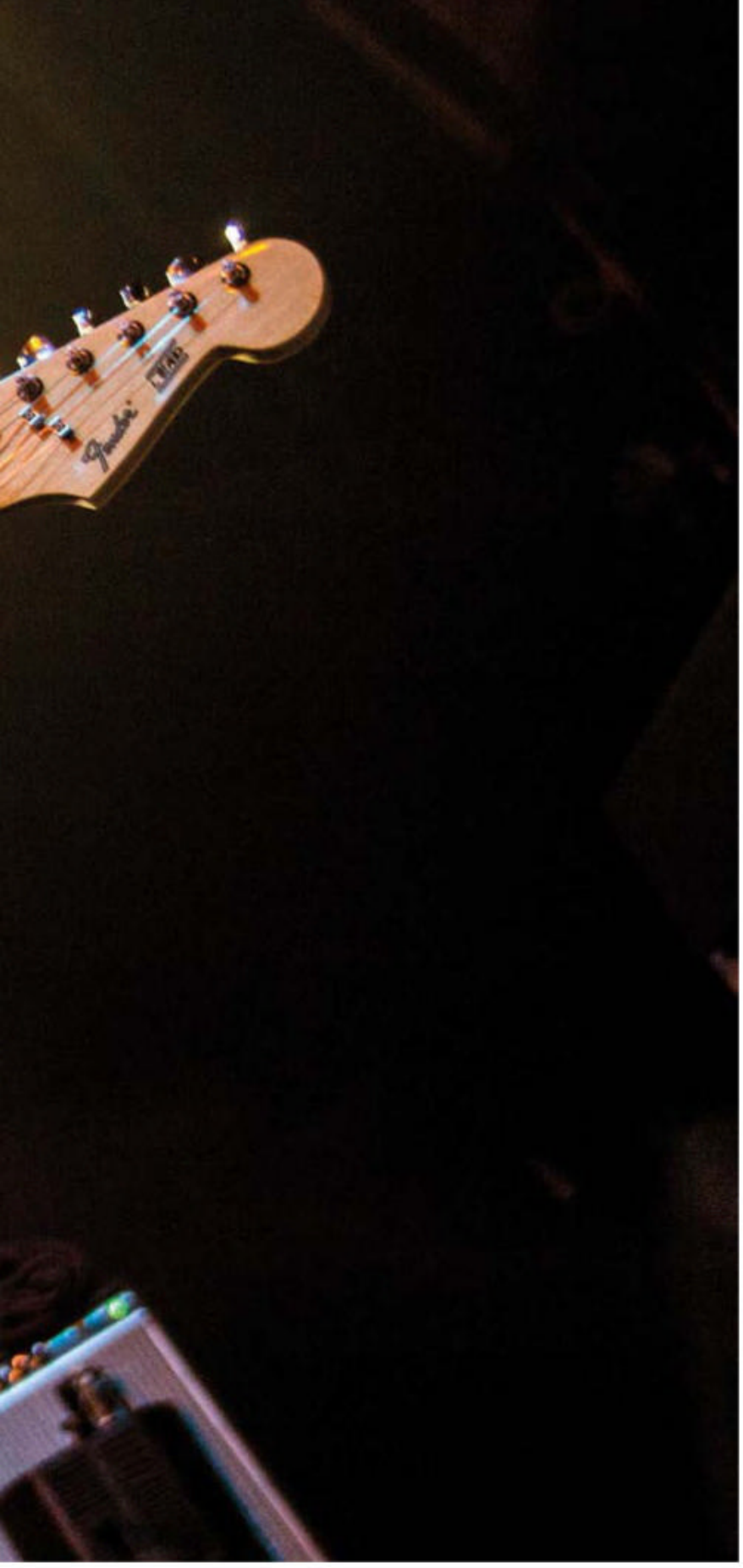
GETTING BIGGER

That determination to keep innovating saw an evolution in the band's guitar sound. It's no slight against *Dogrel* to say that, sonically, *A Hero's Death* is in a different league. It's a mesmeric soundscaping soup that sees the gloomy noir of Joy Division and The Birthday Party collide with Beach Boys-esque harmonies and lacerating surf guitar. *A Lucid Dream* is a simmering wash of interlocking leads, *Living In America* bristles with savagery, and *Such A Spring*'s arpeggios chime beneath the album's most mournful lyricism. Down by the docks, surrounded by sailors drinking American wine, Chatten's fatalism is somehow beautiful: "The clouds cleared up, the sun hit the sky, I watched all the folks go to work just to die."

"We started to explore the soundscapey stuff towards the end of the first record," says O'Connell. "We'd done the chordy thing enough and we picked up from this new door that we'd just pushed open. We were more interested in sounds and atmospheres. At the start, we didn't have pedals – maybe just an overdrive and a reverb. You start to see how you can make the sound of the guitar so much bigger."

"One of the themes on the album is this lower-register single-note cowboy-style playing," says Curley. "We drew influence from [The Birthday Party guitarist] Roland S Howard. The first album was very abrasive, things clashing together, the chords hitting off each other. It's effective for that kind of music but the two guitarists are not really having a conversation."

Naturally, a more expansive sound meant many more pedals. O'Connell's drive sounds came from an Electro-Harmonix Soul Food and JHS Double Barrel, with a new weapon slicing its way through swaggering lead single *Televised Mind*: the Cosmic Tremor-lo, based on the vintage Vox Repeat Percussion.



"I got into tremolos and how you can use them rhythmically, setting them off the drums to create polyrhythms," says O'Connell, with relish. "It's made by this guy [Cian Megannety] from Dublin, by Moose Electronics. He makes the reverb we both use too. I got really into Spacemen 3, their percussive tremolo thing. We were at Moose's picking something up and he had this Spacemen 3 pedal. I was like, 'I want it'."

"I primarily used a Strymon Deco for the tape saturation," says Curley. "Lots of distortions have their own voice and I didn't want that. I wanted the amp to just sound like it's turned up. I have a JHS [Morning Glory] for the dirtier stuff."

STICKING TO WHAT WORKS

After sessions in LA with Idles and Nick Cave producer Nick Launay, the band returned to Dan Carey, who helmed *Dogrel*. "Dan just understands the world we're trying to create," says Curley. "He does nothing but enhance the way we sound." Carey's 1975 Deluxe Reverb was *A Hero's Death*'s go-to amp, with Curley and O'Connell using Fenders exclusively. Both guitarists were featured in the campaign for Fender's reissue of the Lead II in 2019 but Curley's number-one instrument remains his 1966 Fender Coronado, which he bought from SomeNeck Guitars in Dublin. However, he's also been seduced by the versatility of the Johnny Marr Jaguar.

"That's pretty much all I use live," says Curley. "There are songs I use the Coronado's hollowbody garage-psych sound for, like *Televised Mind*. But for anything else, the Johnny Marr Jag can do. It's such an amazing piece of equipment. Jaguars are usually limited in what they can do but this one… any song on *Dogrel* or the second album, I can dial in on that."

O'Connell, who played a Danelectro 56 Pro in the band's early days, is now a Mustang man, reaching for his 1966 example to demonstrate why it's so integral to *A Hero's Death*. "I used two Mustangs – mine and Dan's. His is from 1965 and mine's from 1966. I also used an old Jazzmaster, a 1960s reissue prototype, for the darker songs. It's got P-90s and you can get this low, hazy sound with no brightness at all.

"I love the Mustang's bridge. I love how easily you can play a chord and then use your hand to bend the notes. You can be playing a constant thing with the low end and bend the high strings downwards, like on *A Lucid Dream*. There's a lot more control than you get with a whammy bar. I couldn't really play the new record without a Mustang. Since I've had one, I've learnt to approach the guitar differently. I've got so much better at guitar since that first record. I didn't have a clue what I was doing then. Playing the songs from that record live so much, I've figured out ways of doing them better. With *A Hero's Death*, we haven't had the chance to tour it…" O'Connell tails off, frustrated by the enforced inactivity.

Unable to tour the record they made in order to escape the insanity of touring, what's left for Fontaines to do? Looking a little glum and increasingly twitchy as our call nears its end, O'Connell has the solution. "I'd love to put out another record next year," he says, the brightness returning to his eyes. "If we get time to be together and write, I'd love to do it. It's the only thing we can do right now, so we should do it. I want the next album to be full of bangers."

So, if the first record was the sound of Dublin in transition, "A pregnant city with a Catholic mind", and the second was a determined refusal to bow to public expectation, how might the third Fontaines DC album sound? "It definitely could have a bit more of a romantic descent into madness sound, I think," says Curley. "We're getting more comfortable with dealing with more manic sounds and trying to orchestrate that over beautiful songwriting. I'd love it to be as weird as fuck, and maybe a little harder to digest, just to see what we come up with."

A third Fontaines DC album in as many years, that's uncompromising, challenging and yet better than anything they've recorded before? You wouldn't bet against it.

A Hero's Death is out now on Partisan Records

With new Gibson signature models honouring the legacy of the guitar's most vivid imagineer, join us as we journey beyond the Stratosphere and discover the other electrics that Jimi Hendrix used during his all-too-brief career

WORDS TONY BACON
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

THE OTHER SIDE OF

HENDRIX

Gibson Custom recently issued two signature guitars, the Jimi Hendrix 1969 Flying V in Aged Ebony, and the Jimi Hendrix 1967 SG Custom in Aged Polaris White, both Custom Shop limited editions of 150 pieces (including 25 left-handed Flying Vs). Coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Jimi's death, it was a timely reminder of just how important a handful of Gibson instruments were to Jimi during his short but spectacular career. Jimi Hendrix and the Fender Stratocaster? Of course – but not always. Jimi's most important deviations from his beloved Strats mostly came with these Gibsons, which he favoured for blues-flavoured pieces in his live sets.

The few guitar-oriented interviews that Jimi gave during his lifetime reveal little about his taste for Gibsons. It might be safe to assume that he leaned towards them as the most suitable tools for the particular jobs he had in mind, in contrast to his Strats, thanks to the the Gibsons' different pickups, string tension and scale length, as well as that handy extra fret. He probably felt better among this change of scenery when it came to painting his thrilling blues pictures too.

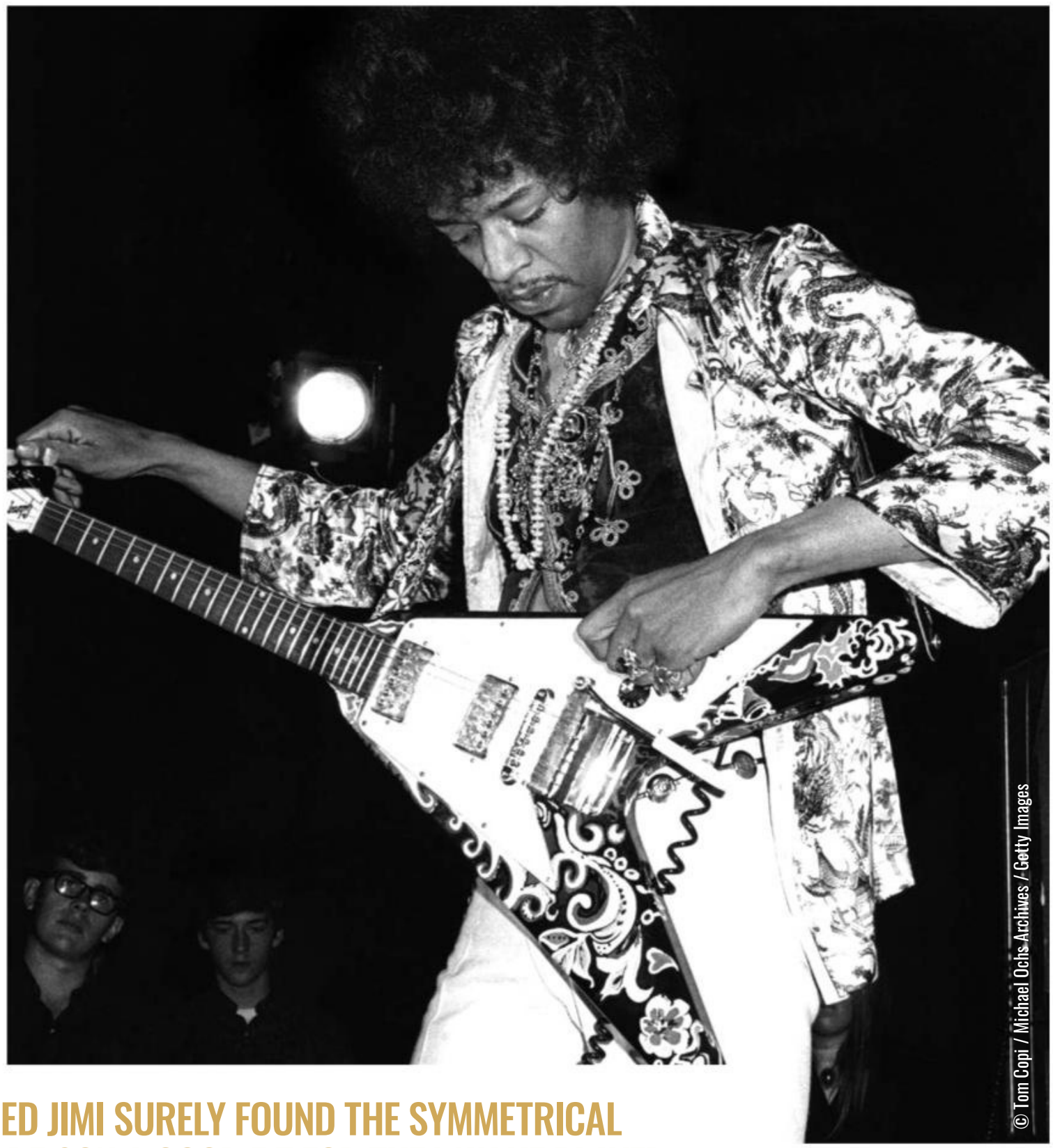
There's strong evidence that, like many talented guitarists, Jimi could get a decent noise from anything he picked up that even vaguely resembled a guitar. There are stories of him showing up for jam sessions – any jam session, anywhere, any time, more or less – empty handed, turning to whatever was offered and still blowing everyone of the room.

In the beginning, before he came to England in 1966 and launched his rock career, Jimi, like most players, had moved up through the ranks of beginner guitars and also-rans. Inevitably, as a teenager, his first electrics were fairly cheap: a single-cutaway one-pickup Supro Ozark in white, followed by a double-cut two-pickup Danelectro 3022 in bronze. From those, he moved to a double-cut Epiphone Wilshire (a relatively rare vibrato version), a few Duo-Sonic solids, which were his first Fenders, and a Jazzmaster or two. When he moved to London, he arrived with a sunburst Stratocaster, the model that would serve as his main choice throughout his few years of stardom.

MICHIGAN SOUND

Let's take a look at the Gibsons Jimi owned. He acquired a '67 Flying V in the summer of 1967 and had it until the start of 1969, using it as his main

© Doug McKenzie / Hulton Archive / Getty Images



© Tom Copi / Michael Ochs Archives / Getty Images

THE LEFT-HANDED JIMI SURELY FOUND THE SYMMETRICAL FLYING V BODY DEISGN A GOOD FIT FOR THE WAY HE PLAYED RIGHT-HANDED GUITARS 'UPSIDE DOWN'

blues guitar for what amounted to something like half of his time in the spotlight. The new guitar that Jimi bought was the revised Flying V that Gibson launched in 1967, with different hardware and materials compared to the first V issued briefly back in the late 1950s.

Jimi's 1967 V didn't have the original korina model's through-body stringing or body-edge rubber strip but it did boast a large white scratchplate and truss-rod cover, as well as a mahogany body and neck, a Tune-O-Matic bridge and Gibson Maestro Vibrola, and chrome-plated metalwork. It had a new control layout too, with the two volumes and single tone now placed in a triangular grouping rather than the three-in-line style of the original model.

The '67-style model kept the general body and headstock shape that had always made the Flying V stand out, with some minor tweaks. It also retained the regular scale length, the 22-fret rosewood 'board with dot markers, and the all-important pair of humbuckers, now integrated into the pickguard.

The left-handed Jimi surely found the symmetrical V-shape body a good fit for the way he played right-handed guitars 'upside down'. Left-handers have three main options: they can forget they're a lefty and play a regular right-handed guitar in a right-handed way, as Robert Fripp does; they can go to the other extreme and get a true left-handed guitar, with everything reversed, like Tony Iommi; or they can turn a right-handed guitar around to face the 'wrong' way, either without changing the strings, as with Albert King, or taking a bit more trouble and reversing the stringing, like Jimi did.

Jimi played his '67 V a lot and it's often called the psychedelic V because he used model-kit paints to add flamboyant decorations to the body. The British guitarist Dave Brewis discovered the guitar in England in 1995, resprayed black and positively identified thanks to unique patterns in its pearloid dot fingerboard inlays. He restored the painted finish and sold the guitar to a collector in 2003. It's changed hands a few more times since.

ABOVE Jimi with his hand-painted 1967 Flying V at the Fifth Dimension Club in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in August 1967

OPPOSITE Hendrix at the Isle of Wight Festival three years later with the custom left-handed Flying V that the new Gibson signature model is based on

FLYING ANGEL

A somewhat haphazard rundown of Jimi's guitars was published in response to a reader's letter in *Melody Maker* in early 1968. "Jimi has about eight guitars," came the reply. First on the list was (surprise, surprise) a Fender Stratocaster. Next was a "Gibson Flying Angel", meaning the psychedelic V, followed by a "double-neck six and 12-string Gibson", presumably an EDS-1275. There was a Rickenbacker bass "which he shares with Noel Redding", and "two eight-string bass guitars". Nothing much is known for certain about the double-neck or the Rickenbacker bass but Jimi and Noel had used a pair of Hagstrom eight-string basses when recording *Spanish Castle Magic* a few months earlier.

By the time Jimi gave his 1967 Flying V to Mick Cox in early 1969, he had already acquired a couple more Gibsons. By the last few months of '68, Hendrix had a new SG Custom, which he used on and off for about a year, again mostly for the bluesier live pieces such as *Red House*. The SG Custom took the place of the discarded Flying V. Jimi, who surely noticed Eric Clapton using an SG with Cream, played his regular right-handed Custom flipped as usual for increased leftie-friendliness. In a similar way to his Flying V, the SG's almost-symmetrical body suited his upside-down approach particularly well – certainly more than the staple-pickup 1956 Les Paul Custom he played at the Fillmore East and Miami Pop Festival in May 1968 anyway.

ABOVE Double vision: Jimi playing his SG Custom at Copenhagen's Falkoner Centre in January 1969

RIGHT Gibson's painstaking recreation of Jimi's three-pickup SG Custom is limited to just 150 pieces worldwide and features a Murphy Lab aged finish and hardware

© 2011 American Broadcasting Companies, Inc via Getty Images

ABOVE Jimi's SG Custom featured on The Dick Cavett Show in September 1969

Jimi's SG had a gorgeous white finish, three gleaming gold-plated humbuckers and the high-end Custom's other fancy appointments, which included a large 'bat-wing' pickguard that Gibson had recently added to the SG model. It had Gibson's regular two-pickup control layout, necessarily wired differently for this three-pickup model. A three-way selector offered neck pickup alone, bridge and middle pickup together, or bridge pickup alone. The two nearest knobs were for neck pickup volume and tone, and the two furthest for the volume and tone of the bridge or bridge and middle pickups, depending on the selector position.

The best-known outing of the SG that survives on video was Jimi's appearance on the Dick Cavett TV show in 1969, where he plays *Izabella* and *Machine Gun* with Mitch Mitchell on drums, Billy Cox on bass and Juma Sultan on congas. After Jimi's death, the SG made its way to north-east England, where it stayed for some time – Hilton Valentine played it on an Animals reunion tour in 1983 – and today it's owned by the Hard Rock Café.

CUSTOM SHOPPING

Back in 1969, the restless Jimi moved on from the SG, which he had knocking around until September or so. Earlier in the year, he'd got another Flying V, a sunburst '69, which he used for a short while. This V too ended up with the Hard Rock Café, who bought it at auction in 1994.

Likely towards the end of 1969, Jimi commissioned a custom Flying V with a black finish from Gibson. This time, unusually for him and one of the benefits of a custom order, he got a proper left-handed guitar. It arrived in about May 1970 and was broadly similar to his 1967 V, except for custom appointments that included a bound ebony fingerboard with split-diamond inlays similar to Gibson's Trini Lopez Deluxe, and gold-plated metalwork.

Jimi used this left-handed black V at the Rainbow Bridge concert in Hawaii in July – recently featured in the *Live In Maui* set that includes a documentary aptly titled *Music, Money, Madness* – and at the Isle of Wight Festival the following month for a fine version of *Red House*. A few weeks later, Jimi was dead. His roadie Eric Barrett later sold the custom V to the Hard Rock Café.

Aside from his Gibsons, Jimi's predominant fondness for Stratocasters didn't rule out a few other Fenders. He had a thing for Jazzmasters, owning at least one white example and a few sunbursts. They mostly came and went, like a lot of things in his short, hectic life. But one was a sunburst '64 that Jimi gave away to Billy Davis, a guitarist who'd worked with The Isley Brothers and Jackie Wilson, among others. Actor Steven Seagal owns a sunburst '65 sold to him by another Jimi roadie, Tappy Wright.

At his best, Jimi was an experimental and inquisitive musician, yet he still understood the value of simplicity and directness when it came to plugging in and letting rip. He knew that a lot of the time it all came down to his own two hands on six strings but also that the musicians he chose to assemble around himself could determine the success or failure of his ideas. "We use the same thing anyone else would," he told *Guitar Player* in 1968, "but we use it with imagination and common sense."

BURNING THE MIDNIGHT LAMP

Mat Koehler is Gibson's head of product development. Here, he lifts the lid on the painstaking work that went into faithfully recreating Jimi Hendrix's SG Custom and Flying V

Tell us about the R&D process that went into this project.

"We started a conversation with Janie Hendrix [Jimi's sister and the CEO of Experience Hendrix] a couple years ago and she has been awesome to work with from the start. She gave us the keys to amazing Jimi Hendrix assets and photo references, and provided some great creative feedback, especially about incorporating Jimi's stage outfits into the case interiors and about some of the case candy details.

"The original guitars are owned by Hard Rock. Due to COVID-19, we weren't able to physically access them. However, we had hundreds of detailed photos and measurements, and access to vintage instruments of the same years to reference. In all, it took about a year to go from the idea to the approved prototypes and cases, case candy, etc."

18+

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AVAXHOME-

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These guitars represent some of the first fruits of Gibson's new Murphy Lab. What goes on in Tom Murphy's lab is top-secret but, asa vintage guitar aficionado, how do you feel about the recent work you've seen coming out of there?

"As someone who's always strived to make sure that we're doing everything in our power to provide a vintage ownership experience with our reissues and artist model recreations, I am proud to say that the Murphy Lab has enabled us to take everything to the next level. In terms of look, feel, authenticity… it's the best of the best!

"Tom Murphy himself is blown away every day. Just yesterday, Tom showed me a Goldtop that he was working on that was indistinguishable from a well-played 1950s Goldtop, and we were both really giddy about it. We were holding it at all different angles and taking loads of pictures. There is some seriously exciting stuff happening right now there in the Lab!"

Were there any period features that weren't replicated for the Jimi Hendrix models?

"The Flying V is spot-on. The SG has a few minor deviations, including the nut width and the neck heel joint – we weren't able to produce either in quantity because of the tooling, fixturing and timeline required. But in all the Historic Reissue and Made 2 Measure builds we do at Custom Shop, we *never* get requests for the narrow nut width or the long neck heel, which made the decision easier to not add another year to the development and engineering just for those elements."

What are the differences between the pickups in each model?

"We went with our Alnico V '68 Custom T Top-style pickups in the SG and the alnico III Custombuckers in the Flying V, based on what we knew about the output of the originals. The originals have patent sticker humbuckers, which are really close to original Patent Applied For humbuckers, with the exception

ABOVE The aged covers on the Jimi Hendrix 1967 SG Custom's humbuckers provide an example of the work being done by Tom Murphy and his team in the Gibson Custom Shop's Murphy Lab

of some negligible aesthetic changes to the bobbins, and poly-coated winding wire instead of PVA-coated plain enamel. They were usually Alnico III or V magnets, like those we used."

Hendrix is thought to have leaned on Gibsons for his more blues-orientated performances but there's still a lot of mystery surrounding his use of gear in the studio. Were any secrets unearthed during the process of replicating these instruments?
"Yes! I was shown some photos of Jimi playing some Gibsons in the studio, including a Les Paul Special. I'm one of only a few people to have seen those photos but I don't know the context and I don't know if I'll get in trouble for telling you that [laughs]."

Finally, Flying V or SG, which would you choose?
"That's a tough one. Can I turn the question around? What would you choose? . They are both cool in different ways. Maybe the Flying V because it was a true custom-order one-off, and it was used during the Band Of Gypsys era, which is my favourite." G

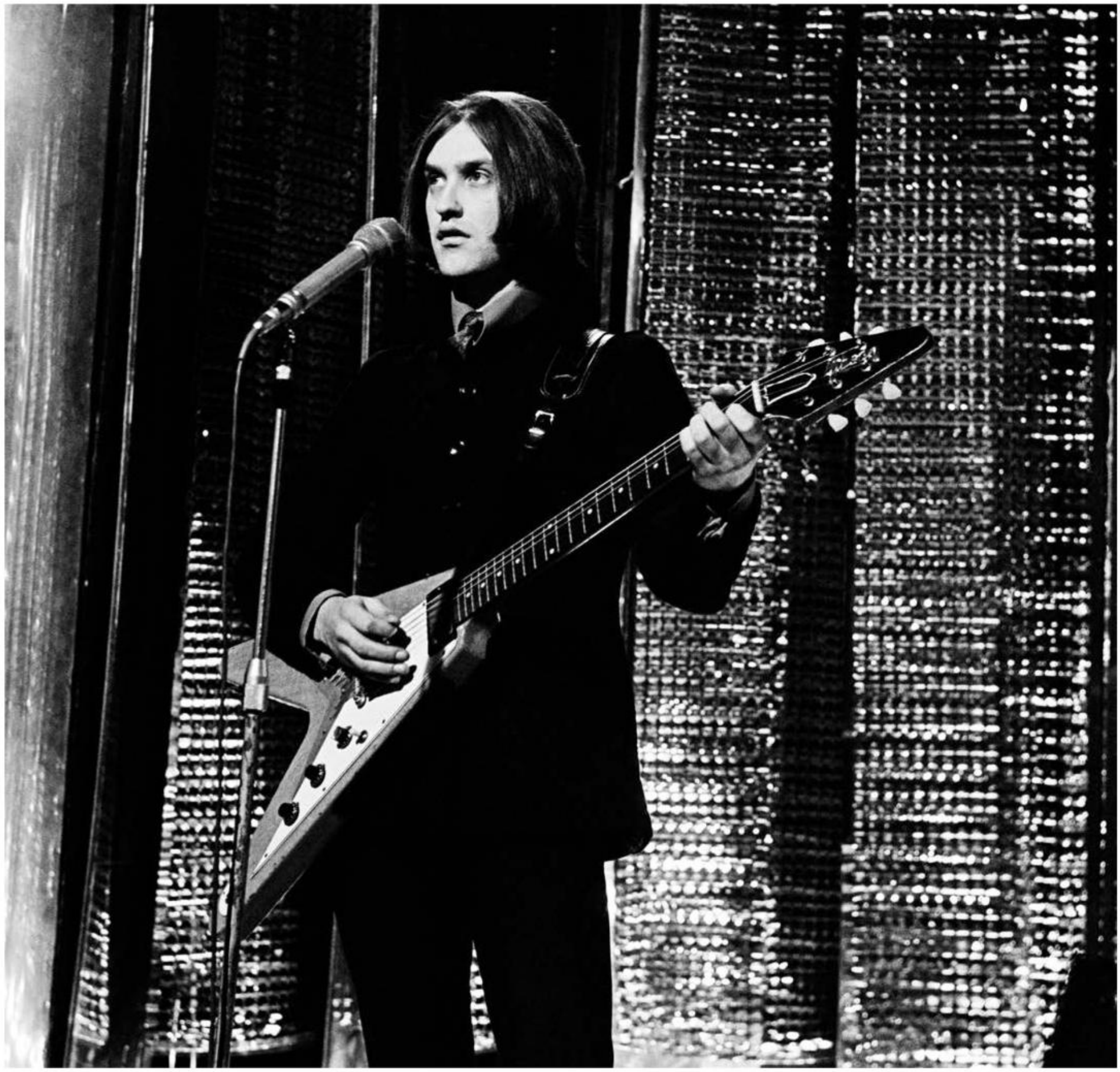
Visit youtube.com/theguitarmagazine to hear both incredible-sounding Gibson Custom Jimi Hendrix instruments put through their paces and head to gibson.com to find out more about these limited-edition models. UK street prices are around £8,799 and each guitar comes in a vintage-style stencilled case whose interior linings incorporate material based on Jimi's stagewear. Case candy includes a Hendrix photo print from Eddie Kramer's personal archive, signed by Kramer himself.

THIS SPREAD
From lacquer checking to chemically aged metal parts, Gibson's Jimi Hendrix models have vintage vibe to spare

NUTHIN' BUT A V THANG

WORDS TONY BACON
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Though it was used to electrifying effect in the second half of the 1960s by Jimi Hendrix and Dave Davies, and later became iconic, the Flying V's take-off was a little delayed…



© MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY IMAGES

Dave Davies knows a good thing when he sees it. As he rummaged in a US music store in 1965, desperate to find a replacement for his beloved Guild Starfire lost by an airline on The Kinks' tour route to the West Coast, he struck gold – or, more accurately, he struck korina.

Dave spotted an interesting-looking brown case on a high shelf in the shop and asked to have a look. After some shifting and heaving, the dusty old case revealed its secret. Dave left the shop with a striking prize: one of the original Gibson Flying Vs that had lain neglected and unsold for several years in stores such as this.

The Flying V had appeared seven years earlier, in 1958. At the time, Gibson was considered a safe and successful Midwest manufacturer. However, managers at the firm were rattled by Fender's growing success and, in 1952, they'd reacted to the Californian threat with the Les Paul Model, something of a solidbody version of Gibson's traditional archtop-style guitar. Meanwhile, Fender launched its new Stratocaster, a gleaming wonder that seemed excitingly new and sported a modern, space-age kind of name.

TO THE DRAWING BOARD

Gibson had little choice but to compete further. So Seth Lover, best known for the humbucking pickup, drafted three new designs that might successfully shift Gibson from its old-school approach to something more of-the-moment.

"That's a body style I designed for them when I was at Gibson," Seth later told us, pointing to a picture of a Flying V. "The idea behind that was to get some new shapes, and I designed this. I sketched out a number of shapes and styles that I thought would be different for guitars, rather than going back to older designs." Today, we know these as the Flying V, the Explorer, and the (unreleased) Moderne. Gibson collectively called them its Modernistic guitars.

Not only that, Seth also provided the snappy model name for the first of the trio to go into production.

ABOVE The 1958 Flying V owned by Dave Davies was bought as a replacement for his Guild Starfire

OPPOSITE When the Flying V returned in the late 1960s it was designed to be easier to manufacture. This 1969 model sports a rare Walnut finish

© DAVID REDFERN / REDFERNS / GETTY IMAGES

ABOVE Dave Davies on Top Of The Pops with The Kinks in 1965 – note the unconventional way in which he played the V during those early TV performances

OPPOSITE This korina Flying V is owned by US guitar collector Gary Gand, who also owns the Dave Davies V

Gibson boss Ted McCarty told us: "When Seth saw the first one, he laughed and said, 'Well, that looks like a flying vee. So we named it the Flying V.'"

The company previewed the new model at the end of 1957 in its *Gibson Gazette* magazine. The following March, the V appeared in a catalogue for $247.50, about £1,700 in today's money. This was the same price as the Les Paul Model, and the two sat around the middle of Gibson's list of electrics. At the time, the Fender Stratocaster was pitched at $274.50, the Telecaster $199.50.

"Gibson leads the way with this design of the future," insisted the catalogue. "The swept-back, modernistic lines of this really forward-looking instrument will be a real asset to the combo musician with a flair for showmanship." The design used dramatic straight lines in place of traditional curves, and the V's headstock, a variant of Gibson's traditional three-a-side design, was essentially the body shape in miniature.

The catalogue said the V was made from "korina hardwood in natural limed finish." Korina was a US trade name for the West African hardwood Terminalia superba. Better known as limba or afara, it's compared to mahogany for its weight and its tonal characteristics for solidbodies but it's a different species and family.

Gibson probably chose korina for its look and colour, which gave it almost a blonde-like Fender appearance – and it didn't require the extra work that mahogany would to yield a similar effect. Gibson was already using pale korina for the Skylark lap steel, introduced in 1957, and had used the wood for the Consolette steel, a model dropped during 1957, so there was likely some stock at the factory.

WINDOW DRESSING

Just 81 Flying Vs were shipped during 1958, a year in which Gibson's bestselling – and, inevitably, budget-price – electrics were the hollowbody ES-125 (1,528 shipped that year) and the solidbody Les Paul Junior (2,408 shipped). In 1959, Gibson shipped just 17 Flying Vs, marking an almost total collapse of interest in the new guitars.

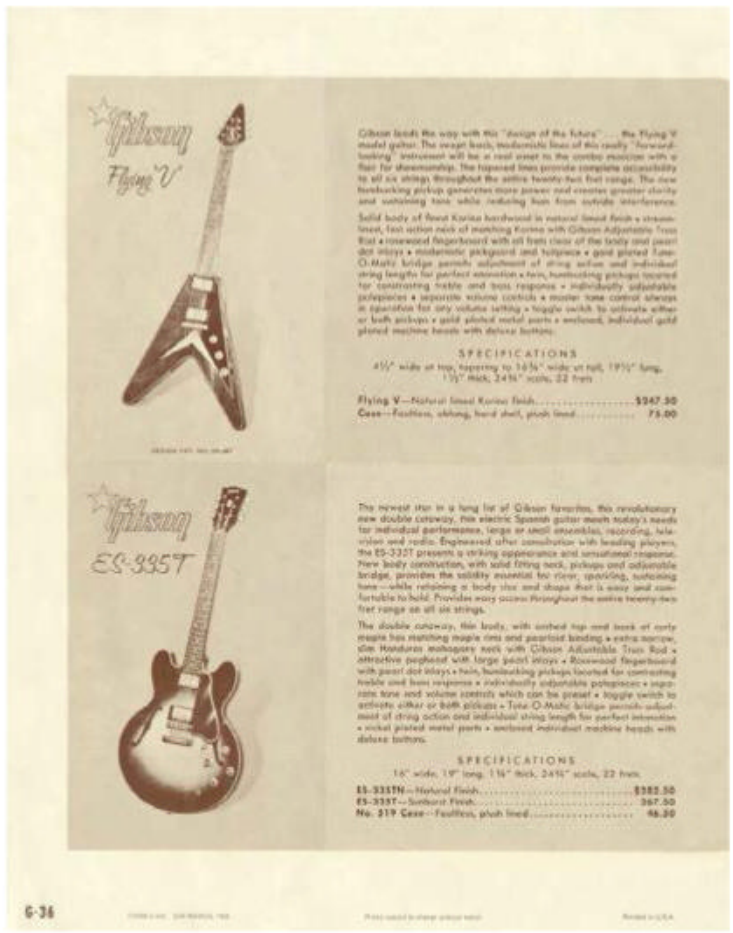
Gibson tried to apply a positive spin to this failure by publicising the fact that some enterprising store owners found the Flying V useful in window displays designed to attract potential customers. One such was the Scalise Music Center in Richmond, California, which mounted an imaginative space-travel theme for its window just a few months after the USA's fourth Earth satellite soared into orbit.

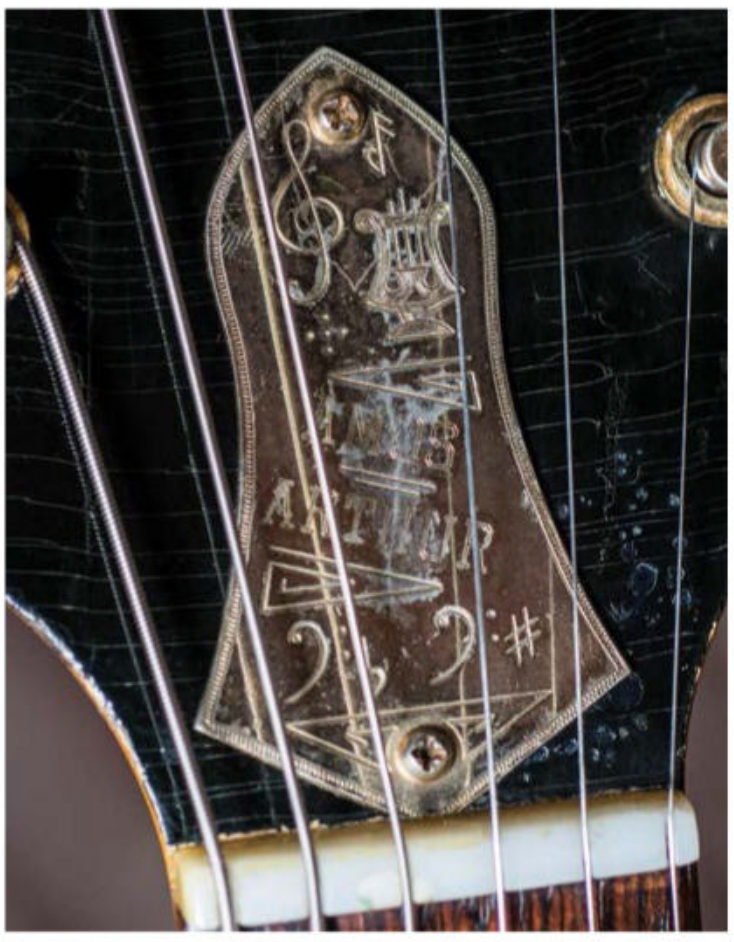
The Richmond store's display featured fanciful depictions of a rocket ship and a satellite alongside a real Flying V. Gibson said in its *Gazette* magazine that the store's manager had never seen such crowds around his window and that the V was sold within just two days.

Most stores, however, had little success with the 'difficult' new model. Production may have stopped in '59 but, well into the new decade, some Flying Vs – such as the one that Dave Davies happened upon – hung around for quite a while in the murkier depths of music shops.

Unsurprisingly, though, Dave's new-old guitar was soon commanding plenty of attention from fans and from the press – and *Beat Instrumental* was quick to seize on the vibe. "So many people have been enquiring about the weird guitar that Dave Davies has been using," the magazine reported, "that [UK distributor] Selmer has contacted Gibson to find out about it. It's called the Flying Arrow and was made for a speciality act in America. Gibson felt that it was too way-out to be a success, and it was only by luck that Dave happened to get his secondhand in the States. As yet, there is no possibility of it being put on the market."

That muddled information was published at the start of 1966. Soon, however, plans were underway at Gibson to launch a revised version of the Flying V, which became fully available early on the following year. Since then, of course, countless guitarists from Tom Petty to Michael and Rudolf Schenker have been captivated by the agreeable qualities of this creation, now rightly recognised as a classic. But it almost didn't make it beyond that brief two-year existence during which, from Gibson's point of view, the model seemed like a failure. **G**





THIS SPREAD Joe Bonamassa's 1958 Flying V 'Amos' is thought to be one of only five to leave the factory with mismatched black pickguards and white poker chips. It also features on the silver screen in *This Is Spinal Tap*

Fender Tremolux
FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA

SUPERSONIC ROCKET SHIP

We spend a sunny afternoon having a close encounter with the original Gibson Flying V owned by Dave Davies between 1965-1992 and used for some iconic Kinks performances

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

"I wasn't always a V lover," says Palm Springs-based guitar collector Gary Gand, as we sit in his elegant mid-century home in California's Coachella Valley in early 2020, shortly before the world would shut down and make such face-to-face conversations impossible. For someone who wasn't always a fan of the Flying V, the former music retail pioneer has ended up owning a few of them. We're here to see one 1958 model in particular, once wielded by Kinks legend Dave Davies and now part of the Gand collection following its purchase via Heritage Auctions in 2019.

Before we get into that, how was Gary first seduced by the charms of Gibson's most angular design? And what is it about the Flying V that keeps him coming back? "A few years ago, when Lonnie Mack died, I thought, 'Boy, I don't have a V, I should just get one'," says Gand. "The 50s ones were few and far between so I bought a used red one from 2001, with a stopbar on it. I sort of got it for show but I started playing it and really liked it. I started really digging it.

"Everybody bad-raps Vs because you can't play them sitting down but my answer to that is, if you're sitting down, you're not playing! Come on – this is rock 'n' roll. You play a V onstage, everybody

hears you. And if you're a stage performer, that's what it's all about! It's a commitment when you're a player: as soon as you put this thing on, you've got to deliver. All eyes are on you! It's a lot like being an astronaut. You'd better leave it all in your pants when that thing takes off."

SOMETHING ELSE

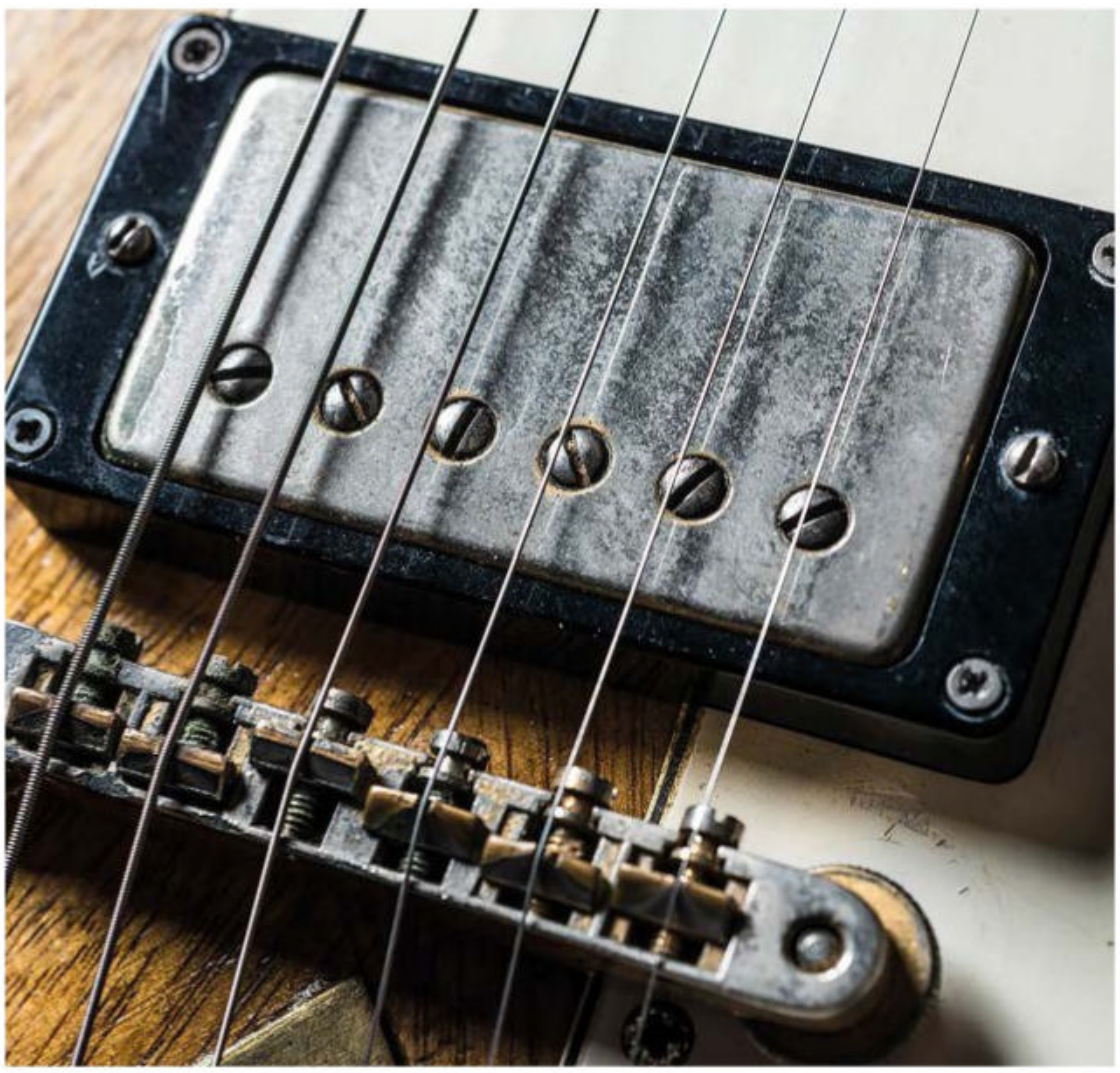
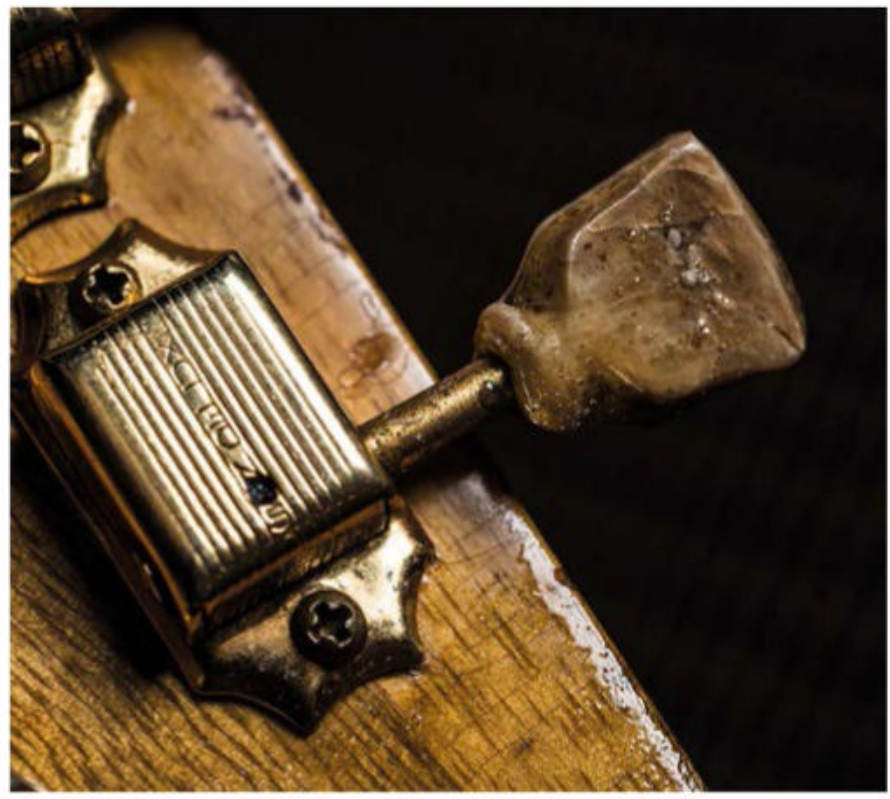
A few years later, after getting a good reaction from using that first Flying V at local gigs – "usually around the holidays, 'cause it was red and I've got this sort of Santa thing going" – Gand went on the hunt for another and invested in a player-grade 1959 model, as featured in these pages when we first photographed his collection in early 2019. Yet that still wasn't enough for this avid collector. "You've got to have one for when the other's in the shop," he says, with a laugh.

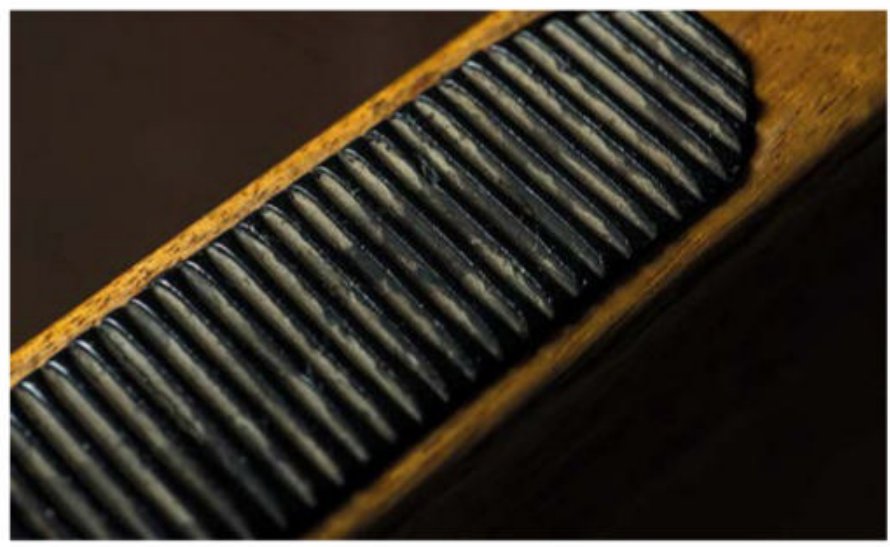
"I was dreaming about the first time I ever saw a Flying V, which was Dave Davies' on Shindig in 1965, when he was playing with The Kinks. It's such a famous image – we all know that, it's one of the great images. This thing came up for auction and I thought, 'I've got no chance in hell of getting this guitar – it's a celebrity guitar, everybody in the world is going to want this'. But I thought, 'You know what, I'm gonna do what I always do, I'm going to register, I'm going to do my homework, and maybe I'll get lucky'.

"I always bid on the phone, I never bid on the internet. I want to hear what's going on in the room. I want to hear how fast it's moving and how many other people are bidding on it. Being a musician and an audio guy, I need to be attached through sound.

THIS SPREAD Although the guitar has been repaired at the heel and some of its original tuner buttons have disintegrated and been replaced, the 1958 Flying V's PAF humbuckers remain intact and it plays fantastically well

MAIN SPREAD The 1958 Flying V's bridge was shaved down on the treble side many years ago to aid playability

TOP LEFT Gary Gand outside his Palm Springs home with his 'other' korina Flying V – "You've got to have one for when the other's in the shop"





"So, we're driving to rehearsal and the phone rings – it's now. I thought it was going to be like in a half an hour. So I pull over, I'm bidding and I think there are only two bidders. They started it at something, then they had a bid and then I bid. Then the other guy bid and I bid, and they hammered it! It was like, 15 seconds. It happened so fast! But it's exciting. The way I feel about auctions is the way other guys feel about sports!"

About a month later, Gary got his hands on the legendary instrument. "The guys at Heritage Auctions did the best packing job I've ever seen," he says. "It took me about an hour to get it unpacked! Then the first thing I did was check the neck, tune it up to pitch and all of that. I did adjust the action a little bit but the truss rod didn't need any adjustment. I plugged it in and it just worked and sounded great."

Aside from a repair at the heel, some replaced tuner buttons and a finish touch-up on the neck, the Dave Davies V is largely original, with its factory PAFs intact. The underside of the ABR-1 bridge was shaved down on the treble side to improve playability many years ago, and it plays fantastically well today. You might expect a piece of rock history such as this to be kept under lock and key but Gary has gigged it.

"I took it to a show, used it on Kinks twin spin and it was great," he says. "It sounded great, played great. We're doing that show again at the end of the month for two nights so I'll take it out again for that. But it performed great. It was inspiring to play."

For more on Gary's music, visit thegandband.com and follow him on Instagram @ggand

THE
SOUND OF
TOMORROW

Having closed the book on one of the most challenging years in living memory, some of the biggest names in guitar effects tell us how they survived the pandemic, reflect on their greatest successes of 2020 and drop a few hints about what's to come in 2021. New stompboxes anyone?

WORDS GARY WALKER

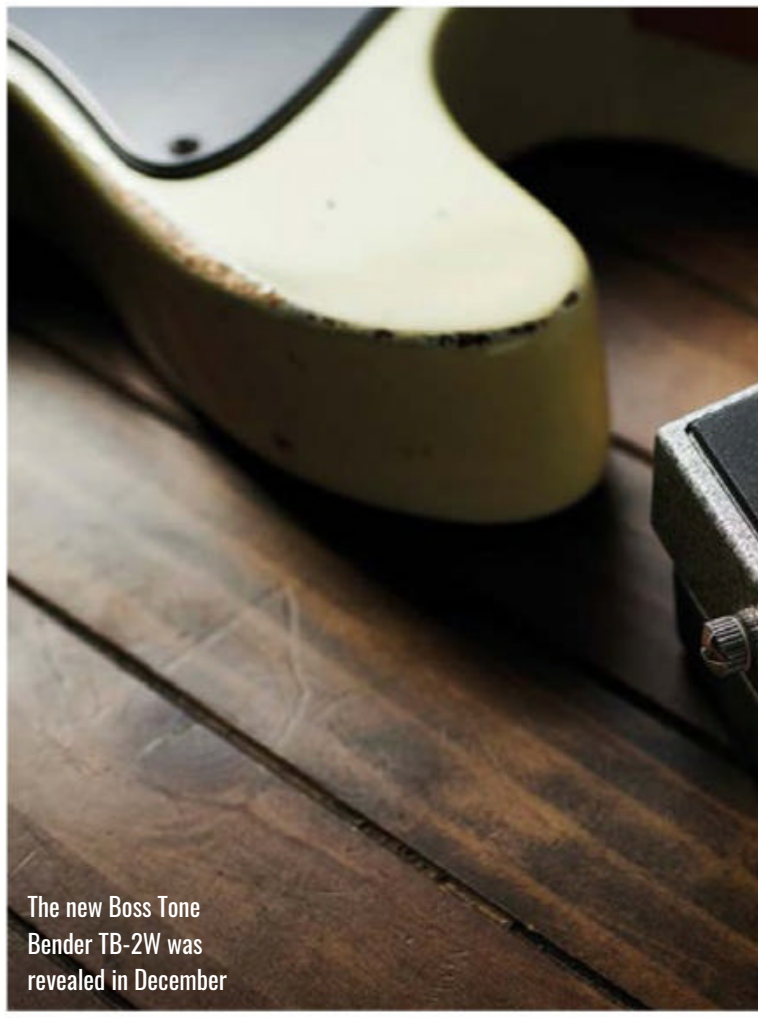
You won't find many people lamenting the passing of that strangest and most turbulent of years, 2020 – and it was a rough ride for the wonderful world of guitar effects too. As we immersed ourselves in the annual avalanche of new pedal launches at NAMM last January, we couldn't possibly have imagined the extent of what was to come. But COVID-19 was already poised to wreak havoc across the whole industry.

As lockdowns came into force, distribution and supply-chain issues proved a huge headache for stompbox manufacturers, causing some to question the viability of their entire business. Meanwhile, remote working became the new norm and physical guitar shops were forced to shutter. But that didn't stop an astonishing array of new effects hitting the market – and with many guitar players stuck at home with little to do but buy new gear, what else were we going to do?

Perhaps due to the cottage industry nature of many pedal brands, the effects world rode out the storm better than most, with the boutique pedal boom showing no signs of slowing down and many builders reporting their best year ever. Maybe it's a coincidence or perhaps it's a result of the enforced downtime giving makers more time to think but, by the end of 2020, we were seeing strikingly innovative and exciting new launches from the likes of Chase Bliss, Keeley, EHX and even industry giant Boss.

It all points towards 2021 being yet another electrifying year for the sector. With that in mind, we hit up the biggest names in effects and asked them to go on the record about how 2020 was for them and – without giving too much away – drop a few hints about what they are most looking forward to revealing in the year ahead.

Beetronics' Fatbee overdrive caused a buzz in 2020


The new Boss Tone Bender TB-2W was revealed in December

2020 VISIONS

With 2020 finally in the rearview mirror, we can now look back on a year of formidable challenges and fruitful opportunities for the pedal industry. Here's what our expert panel had to say about last year – the good, the bad and hopefully not too much of the ugly

"Last year, we took the time to really reinforce our structures on every end of the brand. At first, despite being a strange year, we actually grew as a company; we now have more bees both working at our hive and remotely. We have also built our own recording studio inside our warehouse, where we are having a great time working on a tonne of music projects. The studio will also serve for us to receive artists and create cool content. Last but not least, we spent the biggest portion of our time working on new circuit designs. We are really excited about the releases for next year."

FILIPE PAMPURI, BEETRONICS

"Everything from the classics such as the DS-1 and the SD-1 to the cutting-edge 200 series did really well in 2020. I hope that, if anything positive can come from last year, it's a wave of new guitarists. We were especially pleased with the reception of the OC-5 Octave too. Sometimes, when updating popular pedals, the pressure can be massive. There was a community of die-hard OC-2 fans calling for a Waza version but what we wanted to do with the OC-5 didn't fit our Waza approach. The team in Japan did an amazing job of respecting the authentic OC-2 sound and yet managing to keep the pedal progressive with its tracking and polyphonic technology. The new RC-5 Loop Station blows my mind too. How you can fit everything it can do into a pedal of that size is beyond me! Please allow me to extend a genuine thank you on behalf of the whole team at Boss to all our fans for their support. See you in the pit ASAP."

JAY DAWE, BOSS

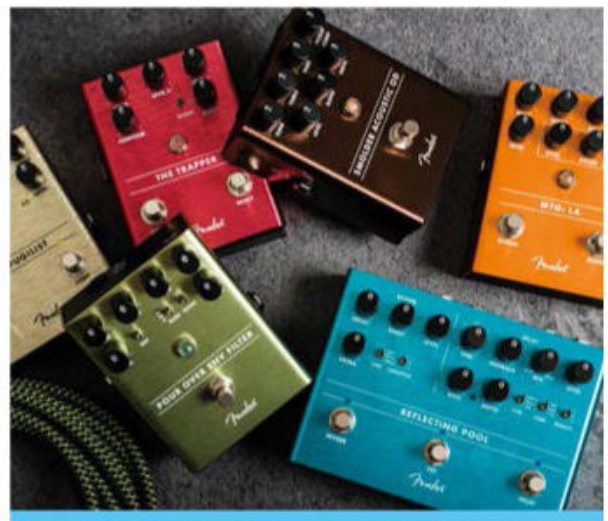
"It's really hard to put 2020 into words. I think, in general, the pedal industry has held very strong, as so many people have been stuck at home and looking for creative outlets. When the pandemic hit, it initially seemed really dire but we experienced a lot of growth last year. We also had to really focus on bringing more of our production in-house, while also staying on track with our planned 2020 releases. It's been really challenging and rewarding. We've added a lot of people at Chase Bliss but we've also had existing employees really step up, which has been so nice to watch."

JOEL KORTE, CHASE BLISS AUDIO

"EarthQuaker Devices had a great year last year, despite everything else going haywire. We released the updated Afterneath pedal in April, in the middle of figuring out how to operate during a pandemic – and the unit has been extremely successful since. We released it as a Eurorack module at the same time, which was a new market for us, and the response has been great there too. We also partnered with New York's Death By Audio and Reverb to do a collaborative release for the feature-length documentary film *The Pedal Movie*, called Time Shadows. It was limited to 1,000 units and it sold out in just six hours, which is wild! Death By Audio is my favourite pedal company, so it was really amazing to get to work with those guys on a new stompbox release. The Plumes overdrive pedal has continued to be a strong seller for us too. We crossed 20,000 units this year, which is just totally mindblowing to me!"

JAMIE STILLMAN, EARTHQUAKER DEVICES

EHX's devilish PitchFork+ pedal received a lot of attention last year



"The global trend of not only new players entering the market but specifically acoustic guitar sales made sure that the Smolder Acoustic Overdrive was our single best-selling pedal of 2020. We've seen an incredible response from customers on the initial introduction of the pedals category in 2018, particularly the Pugilist Distortion and the Marine Layer Reverb. In 2020, we also noticed a trend with players who were quarantining at home developing their own unique sounds. That said, we have also seen interest in our more esoteric pedals such as The Pinwheel increase, as they reach players who have been using this difficult time to discover new tones."
RICHARD BUSSEY, FENDER

The tremors from EarthQuaker's Afterneath update are still being felt

"Here in New York, we were in lockdown from 28 March through to 7 June. Despite all this, Electro-Harmonix released five new pedals in 2020, the most recent being our Mainframe unit. This was our first foray into sample-rate reduction and bit-crushing, and it's been received with great enthusiasm. In 2020, we also released the Oceans 12 Dual Stereo Reverb, the 1440 Stereo Looper, and the PitchFork+, as well as the Cntl Knob, which replaces an expression pedal"
KEVIN JOLLY, ELECTRO-HARMONIX

"Surprisingly, last year was our biggest year to date. In 2019, we worked hard on our supply chain and our manufacturing processes – we had no idea how all that would play into the company staying in motion during and after the shutdown of 2020. We released two series of pedals last year. The first was the Legends Of Fuzz line, which is a throwback to my favourite hard-to-find fuzz circuits. We dropped the first four pedals during the spring shutdown and people really latched onto them. It was exciting! The second series was our $99 3 Series, which came out in November. We have been blown away by the response! The JHS Show has continued on and seems to be hitting the spot, with people having more time to watch things."
JOSH SCOTT, JHS PEDALS

"Last year was definitely a challenging one for us but thankfully we were able to adapt and press forward thanks to one main reason: our ability to design and manufacture our pedals mostly in-house.

Robert Keeley continued to develop exciting new circuits in 2020

From drilling and powder-coating cases and designing and manufacturing circuits to designing the look of the pedals and, of course, building and testing them, we were able to continue development and production of our products."

ROBBY HARRIS, KEELEY ELECTRONICS

"Last year was one that most of us probably want to forget about but it was a really strange one for the pedal industry. Our biggest challenge was our supply chain. Thankfully, our suppliers came through and we managed to get most of our products out without delay. Our biggest success was the Noise Reaper and the PDF-1X Standard, both of which got great reviews and have had decent sales since release. Our most striking success was with customer loyalty, with people buying direct to support the brand. We saw this grow by up to 300 per cent and we really can't thank our global customers enough."

LUKE HILTON, STONE DEAF

"Last year was the strangest year of all time! However, a massive bright spot for us at Bond Audio was acquiring Supro and Pigtronix. With the D'Angelico, Supro and Pigtronix brands all part of one family, we were able to manage all of the turbulence of last year and emerge from it all significantly stronger. We've now got the support and the talent, as well as the organisation in place to allow all of these brands to flourish, and to grow bigger and better than ever before. In terms of our product offering, the Pigtronix Infinity 2 stereo looper pedal has been remarkably successful for us."

RYAN KERSHAW, PIGTRONIX

JHS's best-known overdrive, the Morning Glory, is still going strong

"Last year, we attended NAMM and launched MKII versions of the Lovetone Big Cheese and Brown Source under the ThorpyFX brand. The response has been fantastic and we've received some incredible feedback from customers who used to own the older ones and have been blown away by these. When the pandemic hit, we decided to go against the grain and hire more staff, including Dan Coggins of Lovetone pedals fame as our analogue design engineer. All these hirings were vital to allow the company to grow. It turned out to be an essential decision because, as the world went into lockdown, pedal sales increased and we were able to ensure our dealers and customers could get ThorpyFX pedals as readily as we could make them."

ADRIAN THORPE, THORPYFX

We were impressed by Pigtronix' pared-back Infinity 2 looper

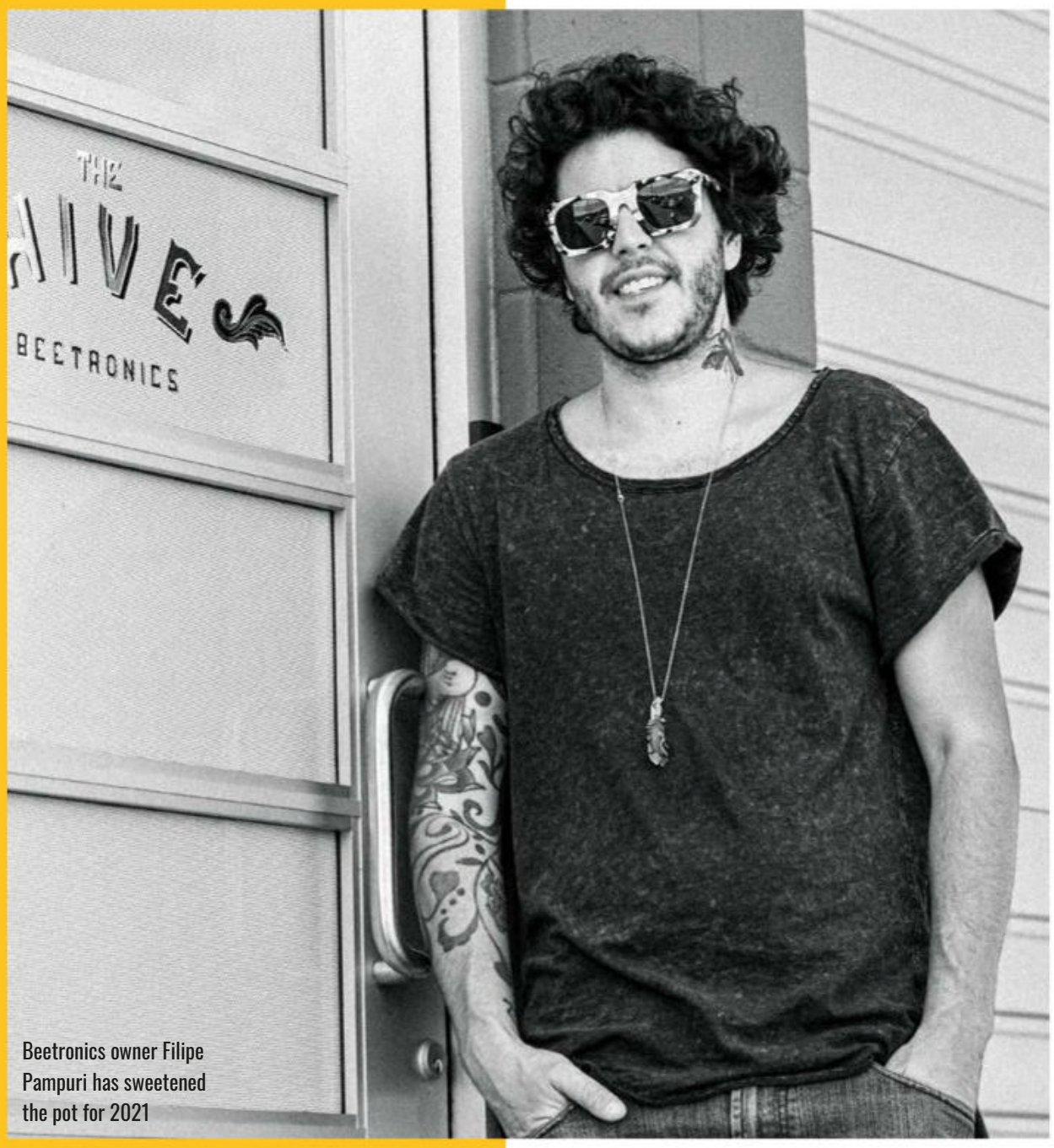
Adrian Thorpe oversaw some vital hires for ThorpyFX last year

"What a wild year 2020 was. We saw lots of people channelling their stress and anxiety into making music, with many in our tribe opting to use the Slö Multi Texture Reverb, Monument Harmonic Tap Tremolo, Julia and Julianna chorus pedals, and the Mako D1 delay. Some folks like me just need to slam some chords into a huge amp – those people are adding the Ages Five-State Overdrive to their chain too."
COLT WESTBROOK, WALRUS AUDIO

"While it was an odd year, we have had several pedals that have been in constant demand: both of our Ego Compressors (small and standard), both of our Tumnus pedals (standard and deluxe) and, after months of supply-chain issues related to COVID-19, the Belle Overdrive, which sold out almost instantly!"
BRIAN WAMPLER, WAMPLER PEDALS

"Our hearts go out to all of the families affected by the pandemic – saying 2020 was a rollercoaster is like saying you get wet standing on the shore during a tsunami. Even though 2020 was seriously strange, we could not be happier with the response to our first offerings in the world of guitar pedals. We decided to start with a pair of unique fuzzy devices and it seems to have been a good idea – the Foxy Tone Box and Jet Phaser have been getting rave reviews, sales have been strong and our name has become more visible in a short time. We feel very fortunate, as there are a tonne of cool pedals on the market these days!"
SEAN HALLEY, WARM AUDIO

Wampler's bumper crop weathered the storms of 2020 well



Beetronics owner Filipe Pampuri has sweetened the pot for 2021

2021 PILOTS

As we kick off 2021, the future is looking at least a little brighter. But with most of us still confined to playing at home, how are the planet's leading pedal brands planning to thrive in the year ahead? And what can they tell us about the pedals we'll be drooling over for the next 12 months?

"We like to keep things under wraps until they're released but I can tell you we have a new pedal coming out at the end of January and it's probably our most ambitious design to date! It's something we've been working on for more than two years. It's going to take everyone on a serious journey. We also have another artist collaboration pedal that should be coming out in early 2021. I can't tell you who it's for but I can tell you she's a legend and we're super-stoked. I've been working on product development pretty much non-stop since I moved my office into my basement back in March. I have a lot of new products in waiting – the next few years will be very busy!"
JAMIE STILLMAN, EARTHQUAKER DEVICES

"We have a lot of projects in the works at Keeley, including our first new Artist Series pedal, the Cosmic Country Phaser, designed in collaboration with Daniel Donato [revealed in December, just before we went to press]. We can't let the cat out of the bag on what 2021 will bring but we're working diligently on several ideas, including a few firsts for Keeley. We'll also be working on a follow-up to our super-successful 20 For 20 series, with limited-edition Custom Shop variants of some of our most sought-after effects."
ROBBY HARRIS, KEELEY ELECTRONICS

"I won't *bee* the spoiler here. However, I can tell you that you'll be seeing some really different honey coming from our hive – different to anything we've done so far. Totally unique and out-there!"
FILIPE PAMPURI, BEETRONICS

"We are working on a tonne of stuff, as always. I can't say too much but I think you will be blown away by the sheer diversity of our pedals over the coming year. We're really operating at extreme ends of the spectrum, both tonally and from a technical point of view. It's fascinating to see such wildly different ideas and technologies go from simply concepts to drawings, through prototype stages and to final products that you can plug in. We can't wait to show you but let's not ruin any surprises yet."
JAY DAWE, BOSS

"Gosh, for the first time, I'm not sure what next year will hold. We have one really unique pedal that I know for a fact will come out in 2021 – hopefully that'll take people by surprise. Other than that, there are several projects floating around for which it's difficult to predict how long the development cycle will be."
JOEL KORTE, CHASE BLISS AUDIO

EHX's Eddy vibrato and chorus pedal was revealed in late 2020

"Very, very new pedals! I can't say exactly what they are but you can bank on Walrus to keep building on the platforms we've been standing on. There is lots of work to be done with the Mako family and the sky's the limit in terms of where we'll go with the original line. If you liked the 2020 line-up, you'll be into the 2021 line-up."

COLT WESTBROOK, WALRUS AUDIO

Keeley's Eccos delay looper was a big hit in 2020

Walrus's Julia has proven popular, and Colt Westbrook promises more for 2021

Brian Wampler and his team spent last year developing new products

"The long-awaited Electro-Harmonix MIG-50 50-watt guitar amp will soon be available throughout the world. The amp is based on the original Sovtek MIG-50, which has a well-earned reputation for rich tone and sweet harmonics reminiscent of a tweed Fender Bassman. The MIG-50's classic design features two channels, each of which boast independent volumes. This thing really loves pedals! Also on the near horizon is the Electro-Harmonix MOP-D10 Isolated Multi-Output Power Supply. It's a professional, pedalboard power solution that provides a premium transformer-based analogue power path with low-noise linear regulators and 10 isolated nine-volt DC outputs. This year should be a memorable one and there are plenty more pedals on the way from us."
KEVIN JOLLY, ELECTRO-HARMONIX

"We embraced the COVID-19 lockdown as an opportunity to focus on new products and ideas, and while we unfortunately can't be specific, we have a lot of nice surprises planned for the next year and beyond."
STAN COTEY, FENDER

"We have to remain really secretive when it comes to our releases, otherwise our distribution chain will get sandblasted for information they don't have, so I can't say very much. However, what I can say is that 2021 has some huge releases for us and that we're really excited about them."
JOSH SCOTT, JHS PEDALS

Stone Deaf founder Luke Hilton promises more monstrous units

"We're streamlining in 2021, bringing out simpler, lower-cost high-quality British-made products and embracing higher-end digital control of analogue signals at a reasonable price point. We're the number-one brand for filters and they're only going to get better!"
LUKE HILTON, STONE DEAF

"Since the acquisition, we've been focusing all of our efforts on relaunching our brands and upgrading a number of our products. Without giving too much away, we've got all kinds of projects in the works. We'll be kicking off the year with killer upgrades to some of our most well-known products, as well as a few unique pedals that could only have been born in the Pigtronix universe. As 2021 continues, we'll be releasing some special products that respond to customer requests we've received over the past few years. This is hands-down the most exciting time for Supro and Pigtronix."
RYAN KERSHAW, PIGTRONIX

"We have a whole bunch of things in the works for the upcoming year. We have been working hard on streamlining and enhancing some of the old modulation-based Lovetone designs, which should be landing some time in 2021. We have also been working on some crazy new effects that have really got me excited too. I think our customers are going to be pleasantly surprised and pleased with the direction that we're taking over the course of the year ahead. We like to give nods to both the past and to the future."
ADRIAN THORPE, THORPYFX

ThorpyFX's pedals commanded the quarantine market

"I can't really get into any of the specifics, of course, but, as of right now, Wampler has a lot of really superb pedals coming out over the course of the following year. Being in quarantine during 2020 gave us a great opportunity to get an enormous amount of new product development completed. So we're confident that 2021 is going to be an exciting year!"
BRIAN WAMPLER, WAMPLER PEDALS

"We're still evaluating what our next steps are going to be. One path that's open to us is to dig deeper into the world of recreating unique vintage unobtanium devices but we are also thinking about what it might look like to offer customers new designs that take all of our knowledge of the pro-audio domain into account. I don't mean to be vague – it's just that we're excited that we haven't decided precisely where to go yet. Vive le 2021!"
SEAN HALLEY, WARM AUDIO

Expect plenty more from JHS main man Josh Scott in 2021

We gave Warm Audio's Jet Phaser an equally warm reception in 2020

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REVIEWS

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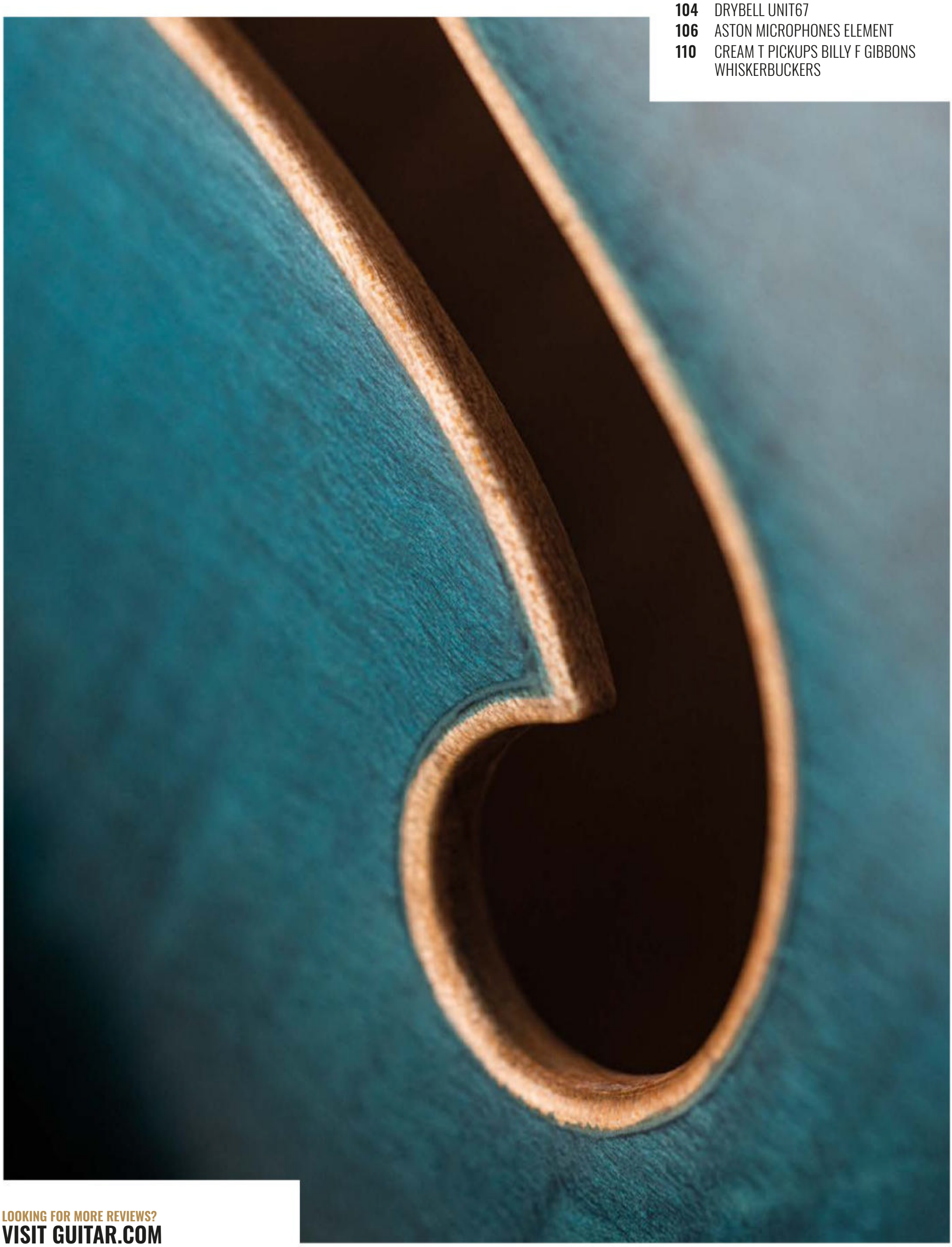

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PRS
SE HOLLOWBODY II PIEZO

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

When live gigs return in earnest, this versatile new take on the PRS Hollowbody might be the space-saving hybrid you need

The PRS Hollowbody has been a staple of its USA Core range for more than two decades and is much loved by fans of the brand. However, with pricing in excess of £4,000, it remains tantalisingly out of reach for many players and sits comfortably in the pro/boutique category. The considerably more accessible PRS SE Hollowbody II arrived in late 2019 and was joined in the ranks by this Piezo version in mid-2020.

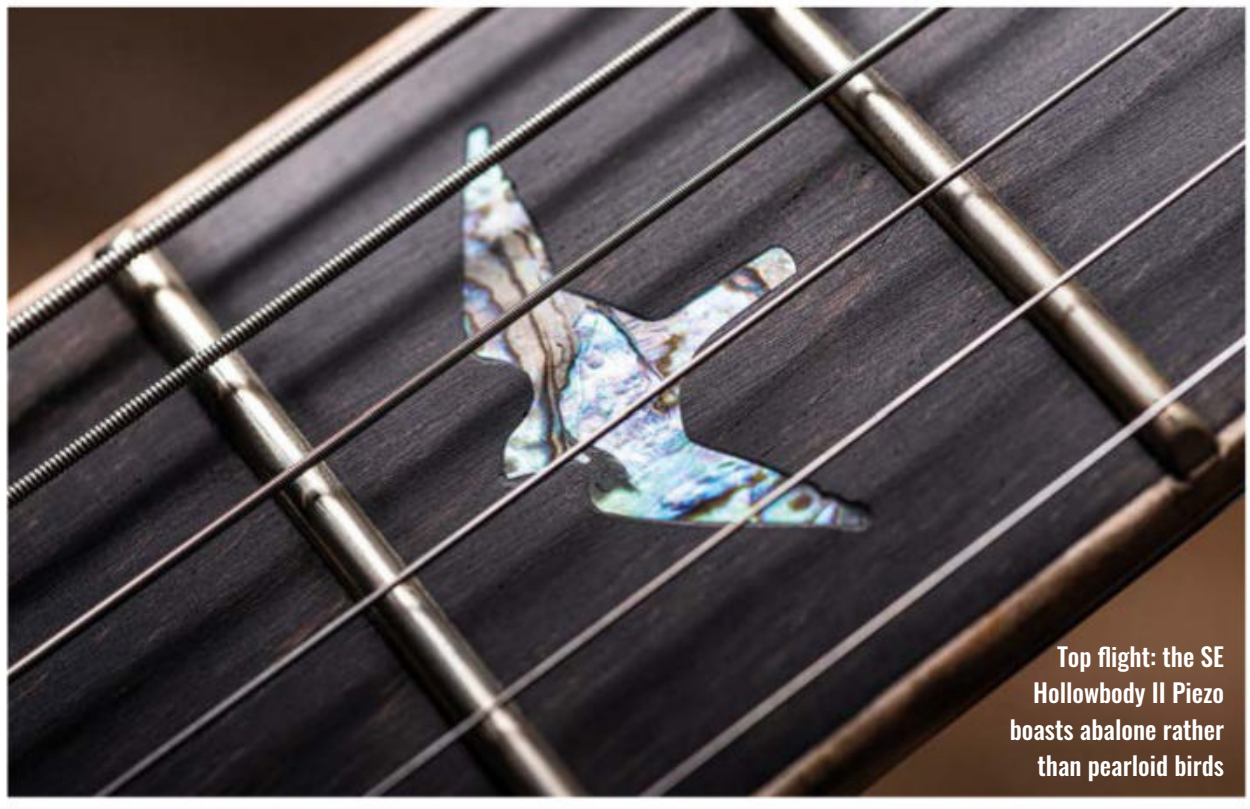
Unlike the routed solid-wood build of the USA models, the slightly enlarged SE design features a bevelled laminated maple top and back with flame veneers, laminated mahogany sides, and a mahogany centre post under the bridge that couples the top and back. Along with the newly designed LR Baggs/PRS piezo system, upgrades to the earlier SE Hollowbody II found on our review model include flame maple rather than plastic binding and fancier abalone inlays instead of pearloid birds.

With a body thickness of 63.5mm, it's 11.5mm deeper than the standard McCarty model but, despite the extra bulge, it retains the ergonomic comfort of its solidbody

Strong and stable: the PRS Adjustable Stoptail Piezo bridge is an impressive design

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,399 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cut hollowbody electric, made in China
BUILD Laminated maple top and back with flame veneers, laminated mahogany sides, Wide Fat mahogany set neck with 10”/254mm radius ebony fingerboard, 22 medium frets, bone nut
HARDWARE PRS Adjustable Stoptail Piezo bridge, PRS-designed nickel tuners
ELECTRONICS PRS 58/15 ‘S’ bridge and neck humbuckers, 3-way toggle pickup selector, volume and tone. LR Baggs/PRS piezo system with dedicated volume control. Dual outputs (mix/piezo and magnetic)
SCALE LENGTH 25”/635mm
NECK WIDTH 43.7mm at nut, 53.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.6mm at 1st fret, 24.9mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 52.4mm at bridge, 37.1mm at nut
WEIGHT 6.17lb/2.8kg
FINISH Peacock Blue Burst (as reviewed), Black Gold Burst
OPTIONS Non-piezo SE Hollowbody (£899) and Hollowbody II (£999)
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT prsguitars.com



Top flight: the SE Hollowbody II Piezo boasts abalone rather than pearloid birds

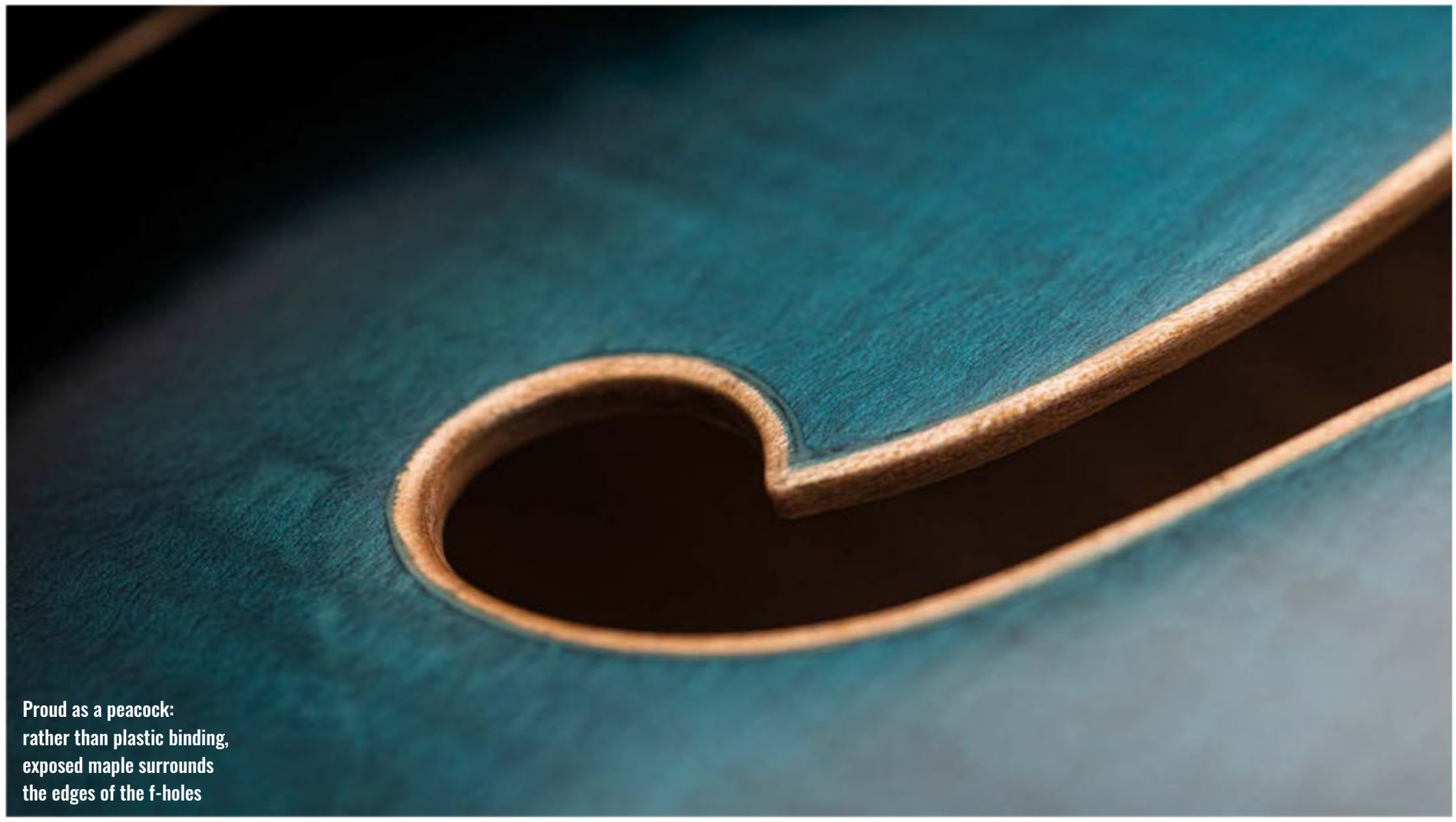
counterpart. The Wide Fat neck carve possesses the girth reflective of its name but is a very comfortable palmful. The headstock is subtly enlarged too, aping the dimensions of PRS SE acoustics.

PRS claims that the Hollowbody II Piezo is its most versatile SE instrument to date – and with good reason. The twin output jacks and independent volume controls for the magnetic and piezo pickups can be configured in two ways: you can plug into the mix/piezo socket and use the individual volumes to blend between electric and ‘acoustic’ sounds or plug into both jacks separately, running the signal from the magnetic pickups into a standard electric guitar amp and the piezo to a dedicated acoustic amp or into the PA.

IN USE

Most players drawn to a piezo-equipped electric will be interested in its ability to provide a realistic-sounding acoustic guitar emulation. We test these capabilities by sending the piezo output to our Axe-FX III using a multiband compressor, a sprinkling of reverb and a few other effects to help ‘stereoise’ the sound.

It’s always a little unnerving to hear acoustic guitar sounds emanating from an electric guitar and, with just the piezo volume engaged, this strangeness is accentuated by the three-dimensional realism of the tones on offer. We dilute our pick attack slightly to compensate for the comparatively light string gauge but the



Proud as a peacock: rather than plastic binding, exposed maple surrounds the edges of the f-holes

Signature touch: the subtly enlarged headstock echoes the lines of a PRS SE acoustic

acoustic-style textures prove percussive and dynamically rich, with a pleasing absence of telltale piezo quack.

We send the magnetic output to a Suhr Badger. Engaging a drive pedal, any suspicion that the airy construction might deliver an unfocused lead tone is quickly dispelled – there's sustain and grit aplenty from the US-designed, Indonesian-made 58/15 'S' pickups. Blending in the piezo signal adds some superb percussive spank to our overdriven rhythm sound – it's a trick that Pete Townshend has been employing onstage for many years.

The Hollowbody's piezo tones won't replace anyone's pre-war Martin but that's hardly the point. Unless you are blessed with a road crew, integrating an acoustic guitar alongside your regular electric rig can be a chore. For credible acoustic textures in a band mix, plus an array of sophisticated electric tones and inspiring new blends,this superbly made instrument would be a fine addition to anyone's arsenal. For those considering the non-piezo version, the extra scope on offer here is worth every penny of the upcharge.

9/10 **Diverse tones and a dependable build make it easy to imagine this classy instrument as a go-to gigging guitar**

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VINTAGE

25TH ANNIVERSARY SERIES V6H, V100 & V75

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

The maker of affordable guitars comes of age with three commemorative limited editions in a distinctive Silverburst finish. But are they worth breaking out the bubbly for?

While we haven't quite reached the stage where you can pick up a 'vintage Vintage', last year was the silver anniversary year for the main in-house guitar brand of British distributor John Hornby Skewes, and it celebrated in suitably sparkly style with a triumvirate of time-tested designs.

Vintage began as a more upmarket series within JHS's entry-level Encore line but soon outgrew that stable on its way to what almost feels like world domination in today's sub-£500 market, with designs that stick as close as is legally permissible to established Fender and Gibson templates but that are built in China without cutting corners.

There are no surprises in the models chosen for this 25th Anniversary Series, then: a straight down the line T-type, S-type (with bridge humbucker) and LP-type. Each model is limited to 100 right-handed guitars, all in this striking Silverburst finish.

Obviously we're expecting three very distinct-sounding instruments here but there are some shared features beyond the colour scheme – most notably the inclusion of Vintage's usual Trev Wilkinson pickups and bridges on all three models.

What becomes apparent before we've even switched on an amp is that they also share a fundamental quality of manufacture, with neat neck joins, solid hardware, well-aligned scratchplates and no snaggy fret ends.

It's only the non-copyright-infringing headstocks that clearly depart from the classic designs but there are practical enhancements too: the Tele-like V75 boasts compensated barrel saddles for better intonation, while the other two have rounded carves at the neck join for easier access to the top frets.

The 'burst has been applied tidily across all three instruments, and we like the retro feel of the V75's single-ply, five-screw guard, which is rather like those you get on 1950 Broadcasters. You won't find many 70-year-old guitars with necks as shiny as this one though: it's a full gloss job on a plank of hard rock maple that's chunkier than your average.

The Strat-like V6H feels slimmer in the left hand and its rosewood fretboard helps to offset the glossiness of the back of the neck. The vintage-style tuners are Wilkinson WJ55 E-Z-Lok units rather than the WJ55 Deluxe machineheads on the V75, while the bridge pivots on six screws and, with three springs fitted, feels firm. This HSS pickup setup is far from vintage but the humbucker can be split with a lift of its tone control.

A deep mahogany body and maple cap provide the V100 a fair amount of heft – it doesn't appear to be chambered – while the neck is a handful but feels more rounded than that of the big-shouldered V75.

Tough nut to crack: all of these guitars feature Graph Tech NuBone nuts and high-quality tuners

Over a barrel: the V75 boasts compensated barrel saddles for better intonation

Power tools: the V100's ceramic 'buckers deliver all the punch you'd expect

The pickups are ceramic humbuckers (with no coil-splitting option) and this time we're treated to Grover Rotomatic tuners, albeit ones with oddly square-edged buttons.

In visual terms, the V100 is arguably the pick of the bunch. Its sharp-pointed Florentine cutaway might be divisive but we've seen this Silverburst finish with binding and pinstripe purfling on Les Paul Customs before and it's a strong look. Adam Jones of Tool almost certainly agrees.

IN USE

For historical reasons, it has to be the V75 that steps up first, with a nearly-clean black-panel amp on duty to bring out the sparkle in its twin alnico single-coils. Our immediate impression, in both bridge and middle positions, is that this is a guitar with plenty of twang.

While it lacks the fresh and frisky cluck of our reference Telecaster – which makes it less appealing for open chords and arpeggios – the Vintage's natural midrange aggression rewards expressive playing, especially with a touch of British-voiced crunch.

The fact that this is the only model in the series without a rounded-off neck heel might imply that somebody at JHS doesn't think T-types are for lead players but give this thing a bit more gain and it's only too happy to supply some ferocious ice pickin'.

Jubilee lines: all three headstocks have 25th anniversary markings

The neck pickup doesn't exactly sing but it's not problematically dull either, rounding out a clean sweep of solid Tele-style tones with the emphasis on punch, not prettiness.

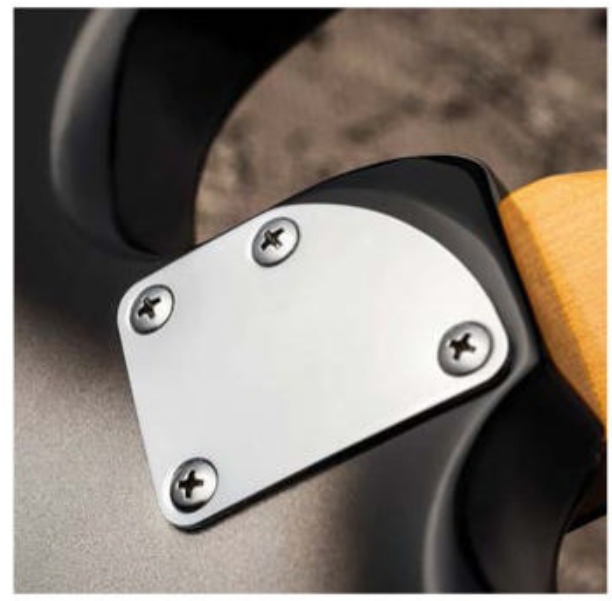
If you're looking for an airier top end, you'll find it in the V6H. Both single-coils – in fact, all three once you've managed to get a grip on that awkward pull-up tone knob – are voiced to please traditionalists and, with that stiff-ish vibrato arm, it's tough to play this one for more than two minutes before being drawn into Hank Marvin impressions.

The V6H's in-between settings offer maximum quack, with a slight drop-off in treble, and that remains the case when you mix the middle pickup with the bridge humbucker in full-fat mode. On its own, the 'bucker is unsurprisingly much darker-sounding with both coils firing but there's still heaps of midrange snap here, which makes this an easy shortcut to chunkier solo tones. As a bonus, there's no major drop in output level when you pop it back into coil-split mode.

Finally, we come to the V100. Ceramic humbuckers usually spell rock power rather than jazzy sensitivity and there's nothing going on here that forces us to rethink that assumption. The DC resistance readings suggest a striking difference in power – at more than 13 ohms for the bridge unit and barely seven for the neck – but who needs a multimeter when you've got ears? In practice, the bridge pickup is a bit of a rock beast but it's not noticeably hotter than its fretboard-nudging neighbour.

In all three positions, this guitar clearly wants to cut through with midrange honk rather than top-end zing – and the more gain you feed it, the better it sounds. If you pride yourself on your right-hand sensitivity, you may find the V100 a frustratingly blunt instrument. But if you like to put one foot on your coffee table and pretend it's a stage monitor, this could be just the hard-rocking instrument you need.

We're struggling to pick a favourite from this trio, as you can probably tell by the matching scores. Our overwhelming impression is that, as long as you're down with that bold Silverburst, you'll be in thoroughly safe hands with any of them. G



KEY FEATURES

VINTAGE V75
PRICE £419 (inc padded gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Six-string solidbody electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Single-cutaway alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 10" radius maple fingerboard, dot inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets and Graph Tech NuBone nut
HARDWARE Wilkinson T-style bridge with compensated brass barrel saddles, Wilkinson WJ55 Deluxe vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS Wilkinson WVTN neck pickup and WVTB bridge pickup, master volume and tone, three-way pickup switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.3mm at nut, 52.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.9mm at first fret, 23.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 54mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.8kg/8.4lb
FINISH Silverburst only
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT jhs.co.uk

8/10 **A solid take on the classic T-type formula that's great for twangy riffing**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vintage V75 **£369**
Squier Classic Vibe '50s Telecaster **£369**
Fender Player Telecaster **£599**

KEY FEATURES

VINTAGE V6H
PRICE £429 (inc padded gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Six-string solidbody electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Double-cutaway alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 10" radius rosewood fingerboard, dot inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets and Graph Tech NuBone nut
HARDWARE Wilkinson WVC six-screw vibrato bridge with bent steel saddles and push-in arm, Wilkinson WJ55 E-Z-Lok vintage-style tuners
ELECTRONICS Wilkinson WOVaS neck and middle pickups, WOHZBb bridge humbucker; master volume, tone 1 for neck and middle, tone 2 for bridge with push/pull for coil-split, five-way pickup switch
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.8mm at nut, 53.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.8mm at first fret, 23.2mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 53mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.7kg/8.3lb
FINISH Silverburst only
LEFT-HANDERS No

8/10 **An easy player for Strat fans, with plenty of zing and a meaty humbucker**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vintage V6H **£379**
Squier Classic Vibe '70s Stratocaster HSS **£369**
Fender Player Stratocaster **£599**

KEY FEATURES

VINTAGE V100
PRICE £449 (inc padded gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Six-string solidbody electric guitar, made in China
BUILD Single-cutaway mahogany body with maple cap, set mahogany neck with 10" radius rosewood fingerboard, crown inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets and Graph Tech NuBone nut
HARDWARE Wilkinson tune-o-matic bridge with stop tailpiece, Grover Rotomatic tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x Wilkinson WOCHB humbuckers, individual volume and tone controls, three-way pickup switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 43.4mm at nut, 53.7mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.1mm at first fret, 24.8mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.1kg/9lb
FINISH Silverburst only
LEFT-HANDERS No

8/10 **Big on power but not subtlety, this is a hale and hearty Les Paul alternative**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vintage V100 **£409**
Epiphone Les Paul Standard **£529**
Gibson Les Paul Tribute **£999**

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DUNCAN DESIGNED
DUNCAN DESIGNED
floyd rose

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £619
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway through-neck solidbody electric, made in Indonesia
BUILD Poplar body, maple neck-through-body design with 12-16" compound radius laurel fingerboard, 24 jumbo frets
HARDWARE Jackson sealed die-cast tuners, recessed Floyd Rose Special double-locking vibrato bridge and Floyd Rose Special locking nut
ELECTRONICS Duncan Designed HB-103B (bridge) and HB-103N (neck) humbuckers, 3-way blade pickup selector, volume and tone
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.9mm at nut, 52mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.7mm at 1st fret, 21mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 53.9mm at bridge, 35.2mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.3kg/7.3lb
FINISHES Snow White (as reviewed), Rocket Red (with black hardware), Satin Black (with gold hardware), Silverburst (with black hardware)
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT jacksonguitars.com

JACKSON

X SERIES SOLOIST SLX DX

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

X marks the spot, as Jackson expands its X Series with another affordable version of a classic design

The Jackson Soloist is now in its fourth decade of production, proving that it has fared well against the unforgiving forces of fashion. The brand's current catalogue includes many flavours, from a multi-scale eight-string to this workhorse shred machine that looks like it's come from Castle Donington circa 1988.

The build is very clean. Aesthetically, at least, there's little to differentiate this X Series model from the high-end USA instruments in the stable, other than the laurel fingerboard and Duncan Designed pickups. The HB-103B and HB-103N humbuckers are patterned after Duncan Distortions and these hot ceramic units are built with hard rocking in mind.

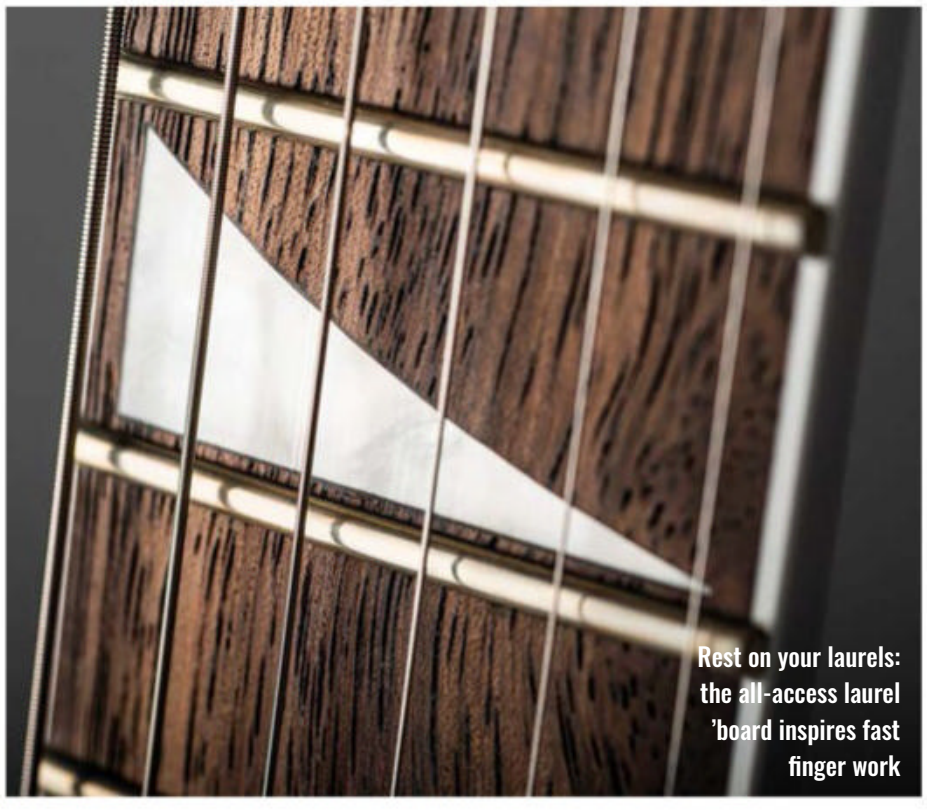
The upper-fret access offered by the neck-through-body neck design has, of course, been central to the Soloist's appeal since the first official models were produced in 1984. Here, the maple neck runs through the entire length of the poplar body and graphite reinforcement rods either side of the truss rod provide additional stability. The back-angled headstock is attached via a scarf joint, adding further strength and solidity to the build.

The slim neck is comfortable and serves as a reminder of why Jackson's enduring designs continue to appeal to the shred demographic: these guitars simply exude playability. Although shallower necks can sometimes cause hand cramping, this Soloist's subtly rounded shoulders provide ample leverage, which along with the compound 12-16 inch radius allow you to pull off two-tone bends with choke-free execution. The action is ludicrously low too and, in conjunction with the factory-shipped 0.009-0.042 strings, fluid legato work is an absolute cinch.

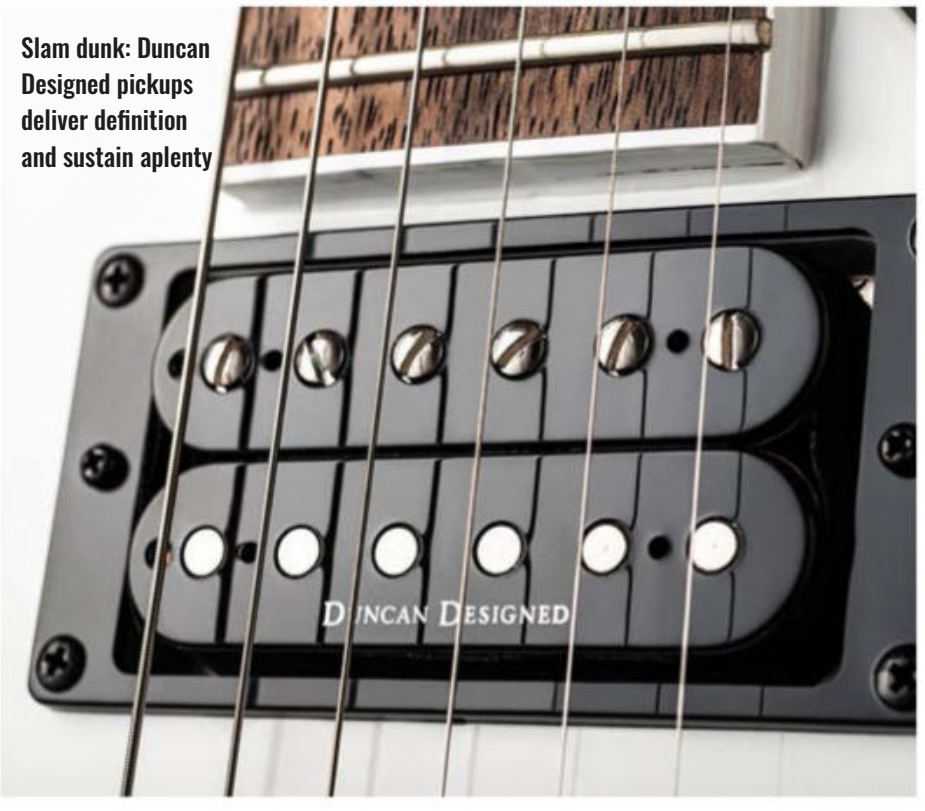
IN USE

Through a clean amp, both pickups are bold and clear and, while they don't quite provide enough versatility to switch from clean thrash breakdowns to authentic Hendrix-style double-stops, the electronic configuration has obviously been designed to prioritise power and clarity.

Lock and load: the double-locking vibrato bridge is the perfect springboard for metal gymnastics



Rest on your laurels: the all-access laurel 'board inspires fast finger work



Slam dunk: Duncan Designed pickups deliver definition and sustain aplenty

Switching to a Bogner patch on our Axe-Fx III, there's both a sense of nostalgia and an overwhelming desire to knock out the riff from Megadeth's *Tornado Of Souls*. The Duncan Designed bridge pickup has a pronounced midrange, which marries perfectly with the classic metal amps we're scrolling through on the Axe-Fx.

It's billed as having "hot-coil windings for a high-output tone" but, in practice, the bridge is more measured, delivering definition and punch on medium to high-gain amp settings. Switching over to the neck pickup, the neck-through design makes its presence felt – there's sustain aplenty along with more compression.

Regardless of fads and fashions, the metal sounds and bands with which this design is associated are no less valid today than they were 30 years ago. The titans from metal's golden era are as popular as ever and the influence of the Soloist on contemporary guitar design can be seen across its countless imitators.

In this incarnation, the Soloist is more than a mere nostalgia trip. For fleet-fingered modern players, it provides upper fret access and playability, without costing the earth. G

8/10 **A high-performance speed demon that's built for the road at a bargain price**

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Schecter Demon-6 FR **£815**
Ibanez AZ226 Premium **£1,099**
Fender Player Stratocaster Floyd Rose HSS **£779**

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Classic combo: the GA5F-MD features a spruce soundboard and laminated rosewood sides

CORT
GA5F-MD

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

In the market for a muscular and affordable strummer for use on stage? This could be it

Based on Taylor's fabled Grand Auditorium body shape, Cort's new Grand Regal model bridges the gap between OM and dreadnought designs with a lower bout width of 405mm/15.9" and a body that hits 112mm/4.4" at its deepest point.

Cort has launched this new line with some interesting wood combinations, such as solid red cedar over blackwood, and a solid Sitka spruce top over mahogany. In this case, we have a European spruce soundboard with Madagascar rosewood on the back and sides.

Although the laminate back and sides require a squint through the soundboard to confirm their identity, the spruce top is solid wood and looks pretty good under a honey stain. While this is the sort of wood combination that you can see at all price points in escalating degrees of gorgeousness, it would be stretching the facts to suggest that this is the finest example of either tonewood we've ever encountered. However, this is close to an entry-level instrument and it's encouraging to see guitar companies testing different timbers.

This guitar is not a million miles away from Taylor's late-1990s design language, with a tortoiseshell pickguard, diamond inlays and toothpaste-white plastic body and fretboard binding. The ovangkol 'board is a nice touch but ours needed a drop of lemon oil to bring out its lustre.

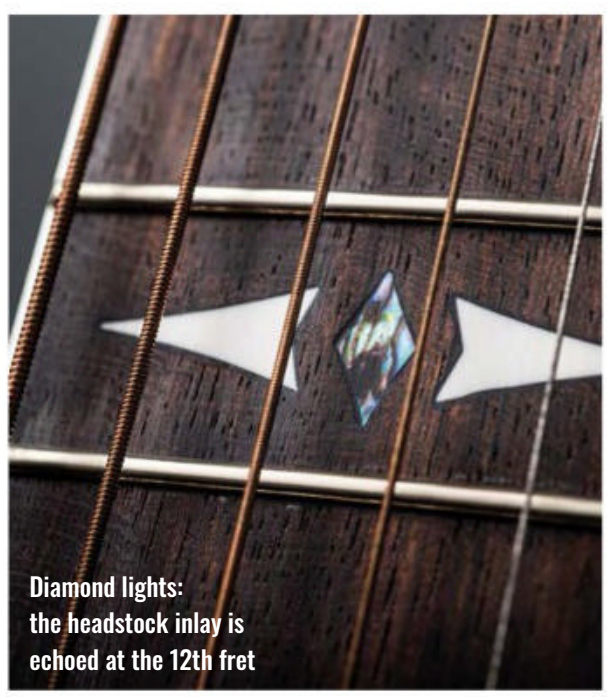
With a brace of strap buttons and Fishman's dependable electronics, the GA5F-MD is stage ready. Its gentle C neck carve, 45mm nut width and low action make it a comfortable squeeze.

IN USE

Our first chords on this guitar reveal a woody, open character with perhaps a touch more sparkle than the average offering at this end of the market. With a pick, the trebles can get a little raw as you go up the neck and there's a noticeable (and not unexpected) dip in volume past the body join.

Sound decision: the abalone rosette adds a touch of class

Fishman's friend: beneath the bone saddle sits a Fishman Sonicore pickup



Diamond lights: the headstock inlay is echoed at the 12th fret

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £469
DESCRIPTION 6-string electro-acoustic, made in China
BUILD Solid European spruce soundboard, laminated Madagascar rosewood back and sides, mahogany neck, ovangkol fretboard and bridge, bone nut and saddle, ebony bridge pins, scalloped X bracing
HARDWARE Die-cast tuners with ebony buttons, chrome strap buttons
ELECTRONICS Fishman Sonicore Active Pickup system with Fishman Presys EQ
SCALE LENGTH 643mm/25.3"
NECK WIDTH 45mm at nut, 54.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21mm at first fret, 23mm at 9th fret
FINISH 'Sonically enhanced' UV finish
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT cortguitars.com

On the button: the tuners' ebony buttons are another elegant aesthetic decision

Fingerstyle approaches work nicely too, especially with short nails or bare fingers, which help tame the wilder treble frequencies. Digging in harder unlocks an impressive dusty blues voice with snappy mids and a growl to the wound strings, while slipping into drop D drives the bass end nicely, leading to chunky strumming, where this instrument excels.

The GA5F-MD's plugged-in duties are facilitated by the active Fishman Sonicore under-saddle pickup, which drives the shoulder-mounted Presys EQ, replete with handy built-in tuner and phase switches. While no-one will mistake the amplified sound for a mic'd up Olson, the results can be smoothed with a hint of equalisation to kill off the quacky transients, and the guitar's voice certainly sits well in a live or recorded band mix.

The Cort GA5F-MD may not be the most articulate flat-top out there but it more than holds its own against similarly equipped guitars in the hotly contested £500 and above price category. We look forward to trying out the other new wood combinations too.

7/10 **A paint roller rather than a fine-detail brush but still a dependable instrument for beginners and occasional players**

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ORANGE
TERROR STAMP

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

No bigger than a chunky stompbox, Orange's latest Terror is a fully fledged 20-watt amplifier complete with a valve preamp and two footswitchable output levels

Ever since Orange launched the original Tiny Terror head in 2007, it has been on a mission to see just how far it can push its tech-shrinking skills while still making amps that are worth listening to. With the Terror Stamp, it may have hit peak diddiness.

This is far from the first stompbox amp we've seen but it's way smaller – and way cheaper – than most alternatives. That's despite it having a genuine valve preamp, as well as a buffered effects loop, a DI/headphone output with cab simulation, and footswitchable output levels.

Based on Orange's Micro Dark head, the Terror Stamp is about the same size as one of its standard effects pedals. The idea is that you pop it on your board at the end of your signal chain and plug it straight into a cabinet – via, if necessary, a stage-spanning 20ft speaker cable that you can add for an extra £15.99. If even that sounds like too much hassle, you can take a line from the DI output directly into the PA. There's also a second use for the effects loop: plug your favourite preamp into the return socket and use the Terror Stamp just as a power amp.

All this, of course, is geared towards the upcoming golden age of post-COVID gigging. But, while we're waiting for that to arrive, the modest output rating of 20 watts and a headphone option make this a strong candidate for home practice and recording.

IN USE

When we reviewed Orange's Micro Dark head back in 2016, we said that it sounded considerably better through a large cab than through a small low-wattage one.

Reign of Terror: the unit features a valve preamp and a buffered effects loop

Big gain hunting: there's no shortage of filth underfoot here

Terrible twos: the Terror Stamp boasts two switchable output levels

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £149
DESCRIPTION 20W hybrid amplifier pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Power switch; volume 1, volume 2, shape, gain; volume 1/2 footswitch
FEATURES ECC83 valve preamp, Class A/B solid-state power amp, 8/16-ohm speaker output, cab-simulated headphone/DI output, buffered effects loop
DIMENSIONS 134 x 99 x 61mm
OPTIONS 20ft speaker cable (£15.99)
CONTACT orangeamps.com

Our initial impression of the Terror Stamp, funnily enough, is quite the opposite. With single-coils at least, it can be hard to contain the amp's zingy treble when it's blasting out through a closed-back 2x12 cab. The intimacy of a compact 1x12 rated at 30-watts seems better suited to the tweaked gain structure of the new model.

Mind you, there's no hurry to be blasting anything out anyway, because the clean tones here are really quite charming. There's a bit of hiss and the absence of independent bass and treble controls is limiting but that shape knob opens up a surprisingly broad range of voices – even if, with most guitars and most cabs, the best sounds always seem to be somewhere around the middle.

That remains the case when we crank up the gain but it's nice to be able to explore so many flavours of British and US overdrive with a single control. Even with medium-output single-coils, the crunch starts coming well before the halfway mark and there are some real boopy fuzz tones on offer up at the reckless end. If only we could switch between high and low gain settings, rather than just two output levels of the same thing.

How does the headphone output sound? Fine, though we can't exactly claim to be wowed by the realism of Orange's CabSim circuit. What we're more impressed by here is the Terror Stamp's power as a Class A/B output stage.

If you've got one of those old Tech 21 Character preamp pedals with the option to turn the cab simulation off, it's going to absolutely love this thing. But there's plenty to like elsewhere too.

8/10 **Given its size and price, this is a remarkably grown-up amplifier**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vox MV50 AC **£165**
Milkman The Amp **£649**
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Absolute unit: the Unit67's onboard EQ sculpting is powerful

DRYBELL UNIT67

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Combining compression, boost and a powerful EQ section, is this unassuming grey box the ultimate tone-enhancer?

If you like your compressors simple, you might find the array of controls atop the DryBell Unit67 intimidating. But there's really no need to worry. In terms of compression, this Croatian-made pedal is a one-knob job. In fact, strictly speaking, it's even less than that.

The thing is, what you're also getting with the 67 is a booster and switchable EQ section, with the promise of Rangemaster-style upper-midrange shunting, as well as less coloured boosts of up to 22.4dB. That's what most of the controls are for – the only knob that affects the FET compressor is the one marked Sustain – and all that's actually doing is changing the blend between your dry and squished signals.

Based on the same UA 1176 studio compressor that inspired Origin Effects' Cali76 stompbox range, DryBell's version takes things further with these extra tone-shaping elements. The one full-size knob is for boost level; to its left is a toggle for bypassing the EQ section, which comprises mini-knobs to cut or boost the low and high frequencies, plus that Rangemaster-summoning midrange control, which can also be cut as well as boosted.

The compressor, then, has all its key variables fixed by the time it leaves the factory in Krapina, northern Croatia. But there is one way to tweak its input gain and threshold: the high/low input switch at the top-right has been included to help create additional headroom for extra-beefy pickups.

IN USE

We refuse to let go of the idea that this is primarily a compressor, so we begin our testing with the tone controls bypassed and the boost knob pointing at the lightning bolt that represents unity gain.

With the sustain set to maximum, this is not one of those subtle compressors that has you furtively glancing at the LED to check that it's actually on. Strummed chords have their transients ruthlessly crushed, replaced by seemingly eternal sustain, while single notes are sweetly thickened and get just a hint of a thump to their attack.

For spiky single-coils, this may be just the thing, even if we end up pining for lost treble content. Luckily though, at least some of it is easily recovered by dialling down the blend to halfway, which makes the compression feel more restrained and natural too.

To really shape our newly smoothed-out tone, though, we need to wake up the EQ section. As with DryBell's wondrous Marshall-and-Rangemaster-in-a-box pedal The Engine, there's bags of power available at both ends of the frequency spectrum but the midrange control is the real star. It goes from a gentle glassy scoop at one end of the dial to full-on honky rage at the other. Used as part of a three-way tonestack, this opens up all manner of additional voicing options for the boost too.

This last part of the pedal's circuit is described as a "semi-clean boost" – it starts out as an uncoloured level-lifter but begins to roll off a little top and bottom beyond one o'clock to help keep things tight and focused – and there's no arguing with the results. Like practically every other aspect of this small but undeniably pricey box, DryBell's Unit67 does exactly what it's supposed to do with supreme assurance.

KEY FEATURES

PRICE €320
DESCRIPTION Compressor, EQ and boost pedal, made in Croatia
CONTROLS Boost level, midrange, low and high EQ, sustain (dry/compressed mix), EQ on/off and high/low input switches
FEATURES Buffered bypass, powered by 9-volt mains supply only (not supplied)
DIMENSIONS 112 x 69 x 48mm
CONTACT drybell.com

9/10 **A clever tone-improver that's easy to use and brilliantly versatile**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Origin Effects Cali76 Compact Deluxe **£279**
Becos CompIQ Stella **€259**
ThorpyFX The Fat General **£220**

Shock and awe: the Element clips into a proprietary shockmount

ASTON MICROPHONES
ELEMENT

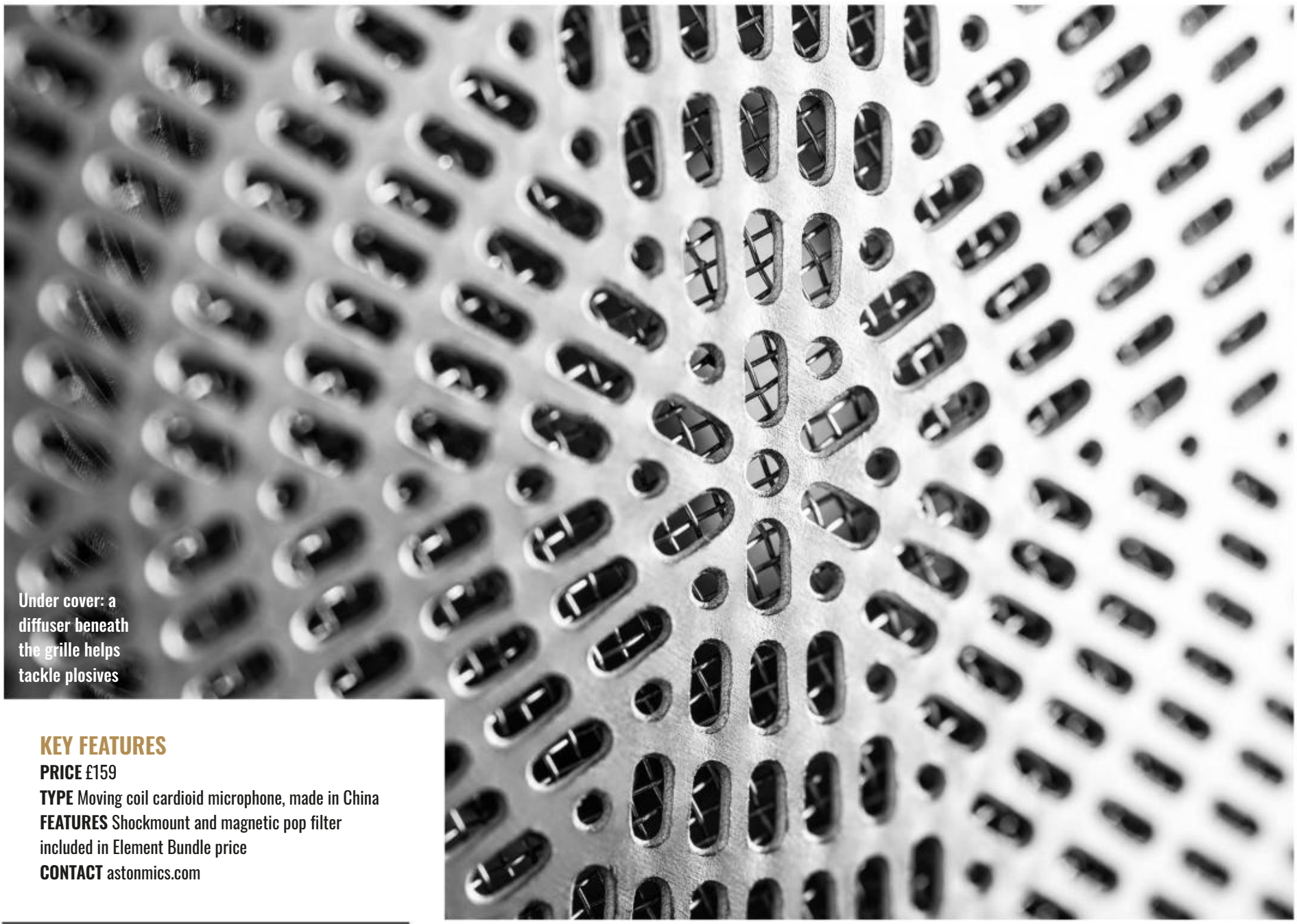
WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar.com EDITOR'S CHOICE

The product of a research and development process in which 4,000 people participated in blind listening tests, could this stylish and affordable mic restore our faith in democracy?

For a relatively young company, British-based Aston Microphones has caused a seismic shift in the often staid studio microphone world, with a disruptive and effective approach to both design and development that has relied heavily on the golden ears of a focus group panel of first-call studio professionals collectively known as the Aston 33. In creating this new Element model, Aston also threw its R&D process open to the public for the very first time, inviting the hyper-critical ears of more than 4,000 members of the music-making community to undergo a series of blind listening tests that resulted in what Aston is calling the first "people's microphone".

Every aspect of the Element's design is proprietary, with no reliance on generic parts or styling. The mic comes in a bundle complete with a shockmount that clips onto the chassis itself and a magnetic pop filter to minimise plosives from speech, singing,



Under cover: a diffuser beneath the grille helps tackle plosives

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £159
TYPE Moving coil cardioid microphone, made in China
FEATURES Shockmount and magnetic pop filter included in Element Bundle price
CONTACT astonmics.com

or indeed an enthusiastically strummed dreadnought. While you might wonder about the impact of neodymium magnets so close to a mic's capsule, Aston assures us there are no detrimental effects here.

At first glance, the Element might look like a condenser microphone but it actually uses a moving coil design. Aston calls its new capsule technology Ridyon and says that it aims to combine the best aspects of ribbon, dynamic and condenser microphones in one fixed cardioid unit.

Applying the requisite 48v phantom power brings the Element to life with a pair of purple LEDs glowing behind the Aston logo. But it's not all about aesthetics – the Element's space-age appearance also plays a crucial role in the way it captures sound, with an elegant waveguide at the base of the capsule similar to those seen on extremely pricey studio monitors.

IN USE

We begin our recording session with the mic running directly into Logic via an Apogee Duet II and are immediately impressed by the virtually non-existent noise floor. This is a quiet and well-behaved mic and, with careful placement, the cardioid pattern also helps it reject extraneous noise from behind, which bodes well for highly detailed recordings.

Purple patch: LEDs add to the Element's space-age appeal

With the microphone positioned at the body join of a Kostal Modified Dreadnought constructed from The Tree mahogany and German spruce, we can hear a great deal of the natural voice of this powerful guitar. Rather like a wide-angle lens, the Element is able to capture a broad spectrum of the instrument's voice and a lot of the nuances of a dynamic performance.

Moving over to electric guitar duties, we tenderly place the Element in front of a Cornford Hurricane on the edge of meltdown. It not only proves more than capable of handling the sound pressure levels but also of capturing a ferociously good recording with very little positional adjustment required. Finally, the Element proves to be a superb option for vocals. That's especially true for voiceovers, with the mic's delicious proximity effect well suited to ASMR-coaxing recordings.

As an entry-level all-rounder, the Element's combination of price and performance is pretty much unbeatable. If you're looking to put together a home studio and don't know where to begin, when it comes to microphone shopping, we'd recommend starting here. G

9/10 **At this price point, the Aston Element is in a class of its own**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

SE Microphones SE8 **£149**
Shure SM7B **£385**
Røde NT1000 **£278**

POWER TO THE PEOPLE

Aston head honcho James Young reveals all about this groundbreaking process

The Element microphone comes in at a lower price point than the rest of the range. What made you want to offer an entry-level model?

"We will never do something that involves a compromise in sound quality just to get a cheaper product on the market. That's just not going to happen. Especially when you consider that the reviews of our other mics consistently say that they punch above their weight when compared to mics that cost 10 times as much.

"The lowest priced mic in our range was the Origin model and we were planning to keep it that way. However, our mad professor Trevor Szynk – who has won awards for his designs in our mics – told me that he had come up with a completely new type of capsule that he thought we should explore. Once he showed me what he was working on, I had to agree. The Element mic uses unique and proprietary capsule technology that has never been done before.

"This kind of capsule is cheaper than the alternatives and we realised that we suddenly had the opportunity to create an affordable microphone without sacrificing quality. No corners have been cut: the body is cast aluminium and all the components meet our usual high standards."

Aston Microphones has a history of using a panel of experts during the design and development process but this time you threw it open to the public.

"We have the Aston 33, a group of top producers and engineers across the industry that's now about 600 strong. They have played a crucial role in the creation of our microphones since the beginning.

"With the Element, we decided to use public testing in addition to the Aston 33 for the first time. It's important to say that the people involved did not know this was going to be an entry-level mic. Throughout the process, the Element was put up against mics by much bigger names in a series of double-blind listening tests that helped us focus on what people wanted from us. Even the person conducting the test didn't know which audio sample was which.

"SOME WERE PROFESSIONALS LISTENING IN HIGH-END STUDIOS, OTHERS WERE YOUNG KIDS LISTENING ON HEADPHONES. IT WAS REALLY EYE-OPENING"

"That democratised the process. We asked people to tell us about their studios when they signed up – some were professionals listening in high-end studios, others were young kids listening on headphones. It was really eye-opening!

"It's a scary thing to do, putting your work on the line like that. Obviously it was a risk. We didn't want our mics to be publicly beaten by another brand. But I've always been very confident in the quality of what we do, and thankfully that didn't happen. There have been enough shootouts over the years to show that we're producing world-class mics."

Aston's microphones have always had sharp aesthetics but it seems to be important that the designs are all practical too.

"The shape was not created by a mic designer. Our designer Jack Munro is an architect but he also has his own watch company, so his sense of how aesthetics work with functionality is very strong. A vital part of the design, for instance, is the wave contouring at the base of the capsule, like you see on some studio monitors.

"The Element ships as a bundle with a cradle and pop shield. The shockmount clips into the sides of the mic and the pop shield is magnetic and sits on the front of the mic. If you're recording acoustic guitar or strings where you don't need a shield then you can just flip it upside down and it's out of your way. There's also a diffuser under the grille, which helps with plosives even if you're not using the pop shield. Every aspect of the design has a purpose – and it sounds great.

"The Element also boasts a super-fast transient response, which ensures that it's a fantastic mic for vocals but also for acoustic instruments such as guitars, mandolins and ukuleles. The microphone can pick up all of those tiny details, not just the treble but across the whole spectrum, for really natural and beautiful recordings. We are very proud of it!"

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

CREAM T PICKUPS

BILLY F GIBBONS WHISKERBUCKERS

WORDS HUW PRICE

Hirsute humbuckers modelled on the PAFs in Pearly Gates, the ZZ Top man's legendary 1959 Les Paul

Billy Gibbons has played countless guitars over the decades but Pearly Gates is comfortably the most iconic. This most mythologised of Bursts is rarely seen in concert these days and, given its age and value, that's understandable. Instead, Gibbons goes to great lengths to ensure that, no matter what he's playing, the Pearly Gates tone can always be heard. Onstage, this is done via exacting graphic equaliser presets. With PAF replicas, he's no less discerning.

The Texan guitarist has been working with Thomas Nilsen of Cream T Pickups for many years now. The WhiskerBuckers are painstaking replicas of the PAF humbuckers in Pearly Gates, as well as the first release in Nilsen's Super Scanner series, which claims to offer "100 per cent exacting electronic reproductions" of historic pickups.

The extravagant package comes in a presentation box with a set of Gibbons' favoured 0.007-0.038 Reverend Willy strings, as well as some signature picks and a Mo-Jo pill bottle-style glass slide.

Pickup specifications include a 62 per cent charged alnico IV magnet in the neck and 71.5 per cent charged alnico V magnet in the bridge. The magnet wire is plain enamel, potted using Cream T's "very special" wax mixture. The wax only fills the air pockets in the bobbin and there's no wax on the base plate or under the bare nickel silver covers.

IN USE

Ever diligent in our preparation, we went unshaven for a week and top-wrapped our test guitar's 1950s tailpiece. For context, the guitar is our recently restored Greco and we're removing a set of vintage Gibson PAFs to make room for the WhiskerBuckers.

Revved up: the WhiskerBuckers come with Billy's preferred Reverend Willy strings

Sharp-dressed box: the PAF-style pickups come in a signature presentation package

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £399
DESCRIPTION Hand-wound PAF-style humbucking pickup set, made in the UK
FEATURES 8.3k (neck) and 8.2k (bridge) DC resistance, plain enamel magnet wire, 62 per cent charged alnico IV (neck) and 71.5 per cent charged alnico V (bridge) magnets, light wax potting, plain nickel silver covers
CONTACT creamtpickupsdirect.com

Many PAF replicas require considerable adjustments before they're able to really sound their best. No such issues with the WhiskerBuckers, which impress from the start. Being very microphonic, they capture every small detail for extreme dynamics and touch sensitivity. The upper mids have a forward quality that is more about punch and clarity than aggression, and the lower mids have a sleazy, compressed feel that makes this set an effortless joy to play.

Single notes benefit from a clicky attack for precise articulation and the wound strings have excellent definition.

Despite having almost identical resistance readings, the neck and bridge produce contrasting but complementary tones. Bite characterises the bridge tone, while the neck delivers a flutier vocal sustain. Both have harmonic bloom in abundance and, when combined, produce a third distinct tone with engagingly hollow and phasey mids.

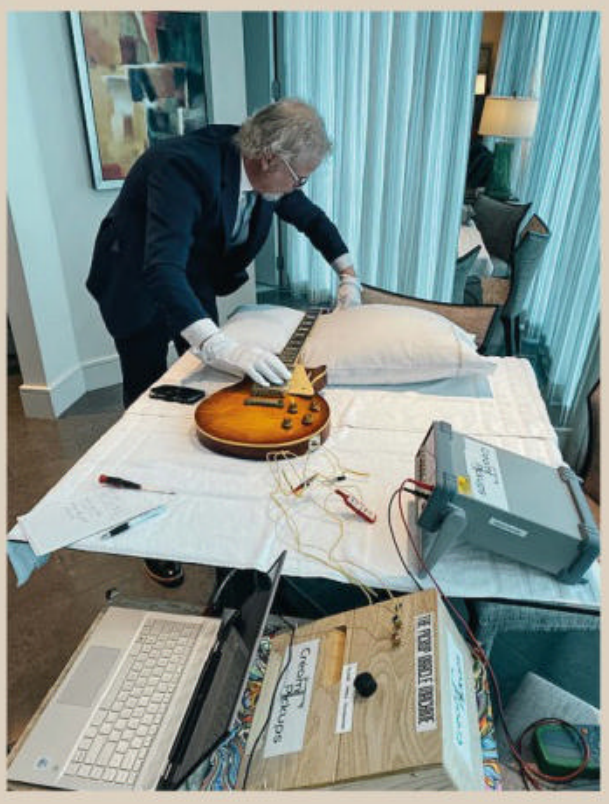
PAFs are quite rightly revered for their wide-open clarity and extended treble, and many builders have successfully emulated that by underwinding coils. Achieving this from PAFs in the 8k-plus range without sacrificing the upper harmonics is something that few winders have found success with. However, it's this that elevates these pickups above the majority of PAF replicas.

When it comes to humbucker tone, original PAFs are indisputably the toughest act to follow. Installing the WhiskerBuckers, however, in no way diminished the sound of our guitar. Further, if you favour the juicy midrange grind of hotter PAFs with harmonics that can be pinched out at will, you'll find this pickup set astonishing.

9/10 **We'd love to see the WhiskerBuckers come with vintage-accurate covers but for powerful PAF tones, they're faultless**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Monty's PAFs **£245**
Throbak KZ-115 MXV **$607**
Sunbear 59 A5 SBPAFs (aged) **£259**



CREAM OF THE CROP

Cream T founder Thomas Nilsen tells us about his new Super Scanner series and his long-standing collaboration with Billy Gibbons

"I started making pickups because I was so disappointed with the sound of the custom shop guitars I had been buying," says Thomas, when ask how he got into the pickup game in the first place. "I pulled out my tools and decided to try and make pickups that had those good old tones. In my head, I felt I had made something that sounded really great."

Nilsen soon sought the opinion of a man with a very experienced set of ears. "I reached out to my friend Elwood Francis, Billy Gibbons' guitar tech," he says. "I feel you should get the opinions of people who have played the best guitars. I wasn't trying to sell them pickups. I just wanted feedback.

"Elwood played them for a couple of hours and loved them, so he ran off to tell Billy. Billy tried them, then turned around and ordered six sets. After that, Billy called me and we were talking about what the guitar world today is missing regarding tone. He's my cornerstone because he's a really generous guy with great ideas that he put on the table."

When it comes to replicating vintage pickups, Nilsen uses a patented analogue spectrum recorder, the idea for which came straight from Gibbons. "Billy put the idea in my head to build my pickup scanner because he wanted to recreate the tone of his 1959 Les Paul, known as Pearly Gates," says Nilsen. "I started designing this scanner to measure pickups – it took me two years. Eventually, Billy invited me over to Houston, Texas and I was able to see Pearly Gates in person. It was a magical experience.

"The scanning process involves recording the pickups, because I'm interested in the upper limit of their frequency response. I also need to establish the lowest frequency to determine the frequency range I need to scan. Pearly Gates' frequency response ranges from 171Hz to 9.5kHz.

"I also measure the DC resistance and magnetic gauss but you can't rely 100 per cent on the resistance readings. The environment you're measuring in is important because, if the room is hot or cold, you'll get different readings from the same pickup. If the room is very cold, the reading may be 2k lower. If you hold a pickup in your hand to warm it, the reading will increase by 1.5k in about a minute. When I'm measuring the resistance of a set of pickups, I'll measure the temperature of the pickup at the same time."

We wonder what Thomas regards as the most important ingredient. "It's how the signal flows through the magnet wires and how that wire is wound into coils," he says. "The cover, slugs, baseplate and the plastic bobbins don't have a big effect on the sound at all. It's all about the frequency range that the pickup gives out.

"When I made the prototypes of the Pearly Gates pickups, Billy was blown away. It was the first time he could get his Pearly Gates tone from any of his Les Pauls. This is the third decade in which I've been involved with Billy Gibbons. We work closely together and with every pickup I make that involves him, he's onboard and we make any decisions together."

ARCTIC MONKEYS LIVE AT THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL

NEW DOUBLE ALBUM

OUT NOW

ALL PROCEEDS GO TO WAR CHILD UK

Domino

WAR child

THE RUNDOWN

THIS MONTH'S BEST NEW GEAR

WORDS CILLIAN BREATHNACH

From affordable classics to stunning signature models, here's the best new gear announced this month

EPIPHONE CASINO WORN

1 With Gibson launching US-made Casinos at NAMM last year, it's good to see the brand still giving some love to its more affordable counterpart in the shape of this revamped model. With P-90s and a 1960s-style C-shaped neck profile, it's certainly got a vintage vibe, and the new Worn finishes provide a more approachable feel. Flip to p18 for a chance to win one.

YAMAHA PACIFICA 612VIIFMX

2 Celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Pacifica, this new 612 model is a boutique-style twist on the venerable budget electric. Not only do you get a flamed maple top but also Seymour Duncan pickups in a HSS configuration, a Graph Tech Tusq nut and string trees, Grover locking tuners, and a Wilkinson VS50 bridge. A pimped Pacifica indeed.

IBANEZ GENESIS COLLECTION RG565

5 With shred guitar and 1990s revivalism regaining popularity in recent years, it's no surprise that Ibanez has revived one of its hidden gems from the early part of that decade. Originally launched in 1991 and discontinued just a year later as grunge began to change the shape of guitar, this two-pickup, 24-fret Fluorescent Orange monster is no shrinking violet.

BLACKSTAR CARRY-ON

6 With Blackstar having spent the past few years revolutionising the sound quality of portable amps, it makes sense that the company would design a bijou guitar with which to create the ultimate portable rig. Designed with UK brand Gordon Smith, the Carry-On sports a tiny 20.7-inch scale length, 19 frets and a coil-splittable mini-humbucker.

GIBSON SLASH ‘VICTORIA’ LES PAUL STANDARD GOLDTOP

3 Last time we spoke to Slash, he surprised us by admitting that he’d become enamoured with his P-90-loaded Goldtop of late and, while this latest edition to the Slash Collection doesn’t go all the way, it suggests he’s clearly digging the Goldtop vibe. As for the name? Slash says it’s named after a woman he claims stole guitars from him in the late 1990s.

FENDER TASH SULTANA STRATOCASTER

4 Not many artists get a signature Fender guitar off the back of just a single studio album but Aussie multi-instrumentalist Tash is not your average artist either. This signature Strat features a versatile HSS configuration designed to facilitate Tash’s layered looping guitar style, plus a striking Transparent Cherry finish with gold hardware.

BOSS WAZA CRAFT TONE BENDER TB-2W

7 Only the second-ever collaboration between pedal giant Boss and another maker, the TB-2W is modelled on the legendary Solasound Tone Bender. Boss worked closely with the British brand to faithfully nail the stompbox’s iconic fuzz tone, as well as to reimagine the unit’s classic 1960s-style livery in the form of a Boss Compact Pedal. We can’t wait to plug one in.

ELECTRO-HARMONIX EDDY

8 You can always rely on Electro-Harmonix to keep churning out fun, inventive and affordable guitar pedals at a rate few brands can compete with. The Eddy is a chorus/vibrato that employs a similar Bucket Brigade circuit to the legendary Memory Man to produce its effect, and it sure seems to be a thrilling and wobbly proposition.

Millimetric founder Florian Bouyou is based in Montreal, Canada

INDUSTRY INSIDER

MILLIMETRIC INSTRUMENTS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Surely one of the market's most intriguing and unusual guitar brands, Millimetric makes distinctive instruments inspired by mid-century Scandinavian furniture and brutalist architecture. Founder Florian Bouyou tells us how his fascinating company got started

How did you get into guitar?

"I started playing guitar about 15 years ago when I was leaving my parents' home and playing drums was not a daily option anymore. A friend lent me a guitar and I got hooked on the immediacy and possibilities that were in front of me, especially with effects pedals and other gear."

When did you start building or tinkering with guitars?

"Shortly after getting my first guitar, I began getting pedals and amps, and started experimenting with them to find new sounds. A friend gave me his Aria Les Paul Custom copy and I started taking it apart and replacing parts, experimenting with all of its many sonic possibilities.

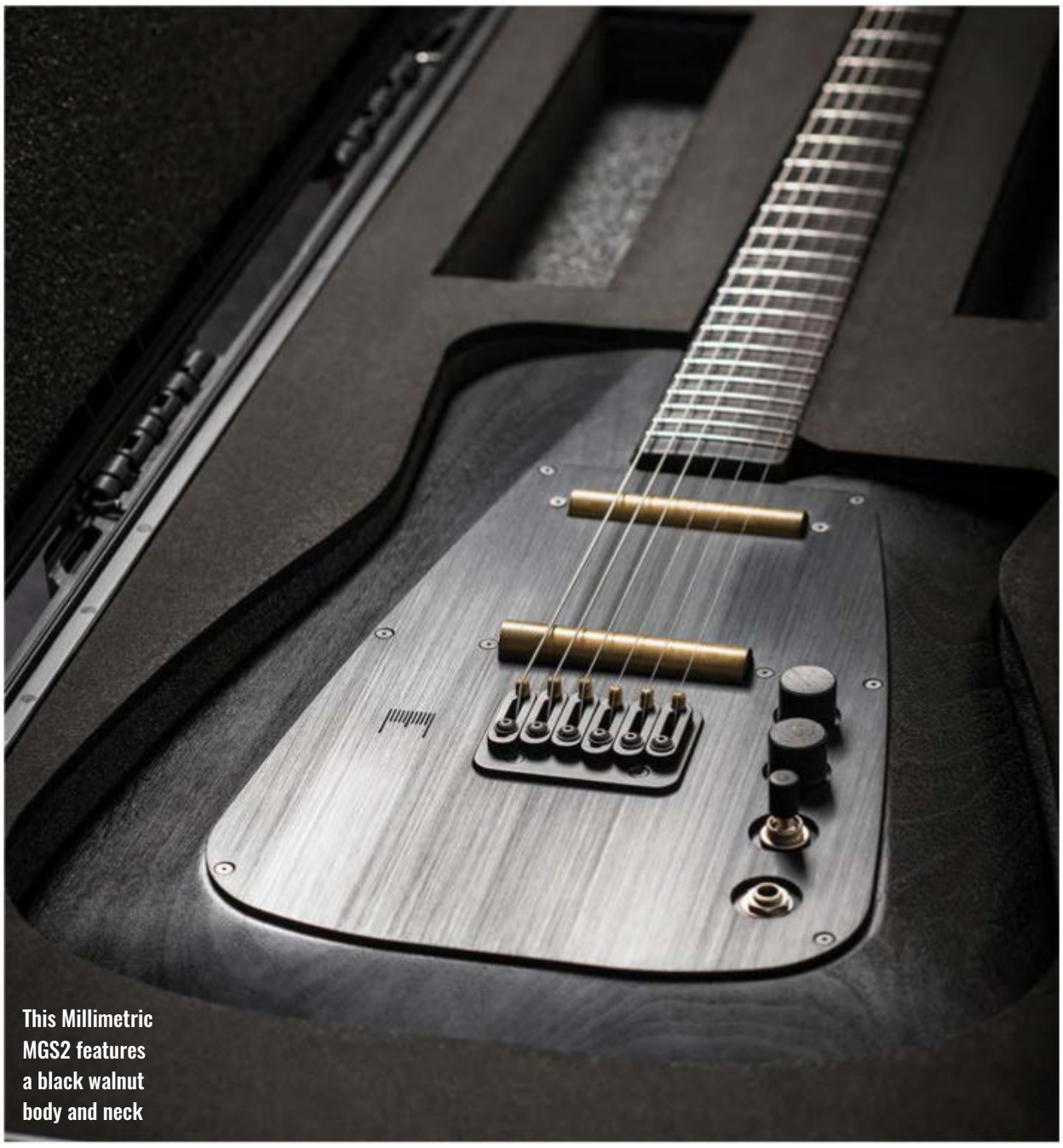
"At that time, I was studying graphic design and spent a lot of time drawing out guitar shapes and ideas. I then wanted to study guitar making and applied to Montreal's Bruand luthiery school but was refused, so I went for the cabinet making program instead, and ended up getting hooked on building Scandinavian and minimalist-style furniture. In the middle of my third year, I built my first guitar, heavily inspired by Obstructures and Travis Bean's aluminium designs. A few years after that, in about 2012, Millimetric Instruments was born."

When did you realise you had a viable business?

"After building my first few guitars and beginning my Instagram page, I quickly realised that my designs were filling an empty space on the market. I found a niche and got deeper and deeper into it, embracing minimal designs and colourful finishes. When the MGS3 was released, I got a handful of orders in a matter of weeks and then felt like someday I might be able to do this full time. Fast forward to a few years later, I now make 20 to 25 guitars a year."

Did you have any external support starting out?

"The hardest part about guitar building is finding the right tools and the right space to get started. I started out very slowly.



This Millimetric MGS2 features a black walnut body and neck

Millimetric Instruments are available to order in the UK via homeoftone.co.uk

I was sharing a woodworking shop with friends and buying a few tools every few months when money allowed – I think patience was the key. I kept it as a side gig for a few years, while trying to get my brand noticed on social media, on forums and in Facebook groups. I never really had grants or investors, I just got financial and moral support from my parents and, most importantly, my wife, who was always there for me and continued to support me no matter what."

When did you feel like you'd nailed your branding?
"Branding comes very naturally to me and is often the first thing I think about when starting a new project. The first time it all made perfect sense was when I made the first Millimetric Instruments business cards for a local arts and craft show. The logo came very early. A few months after making my first guitar, I found the name Millimetric and quickly did a few tests on my computer. People too often overlook that and don't see the benefits of strong branding."

How did you come up with your best-selling product?
"My best-selling model is the MGS3. I came up with it because I always felt my first model was too brutal and minimalist and a bit out-of-reach visually for people that don't have a design background. The 2010s was a decade of offset guitars. Lots of people, including me, wanted Jazzmasters or other offset shapes. I just took a chance and designed what a Millimetric Instruments offset would look like. I took a Jazzmaster shape and simplified it as much as I could without removing its funkiness. I'm still working on the vibrato part though!"

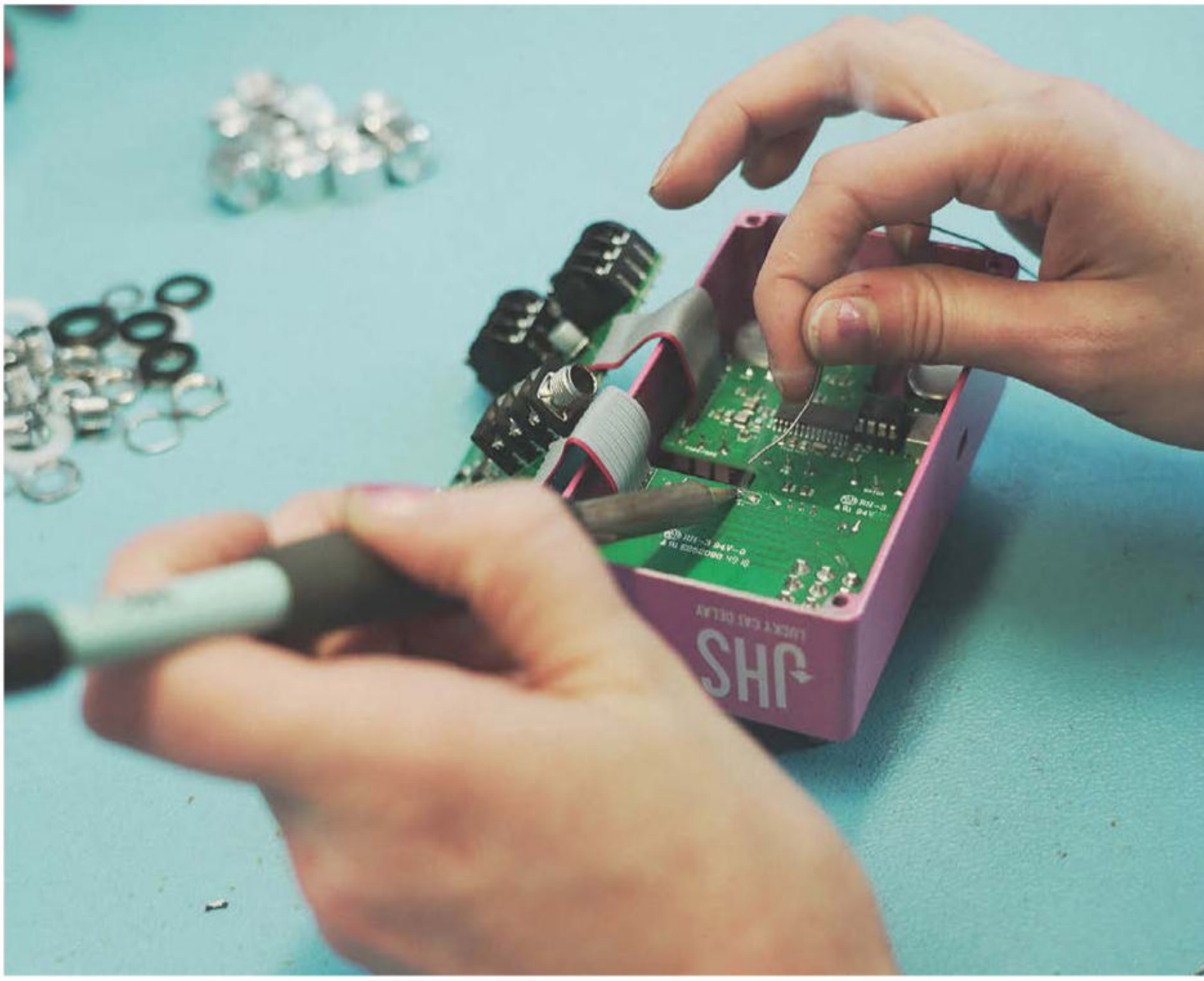
What's your proudest moment as a maker?
"I think the proudest moment was when I opened the shop in the house I bought with my wife. I dreamt of having a place like that for years and I think it's the goal for a lot of luthiers to have their own space, a place to grow things and ideas. Everyday I enter the shop and it reminds me how lucky I am to have this place and to be able to make guitars for people around the world."

What do you think are the biggest opportunities for the guitar industry going forward?
"Last year was a very intriguing one and it was certainly the worst for a lot of things. But, curiously, it was an amazing year for me business-wise. I had colleagues around the world saying that their numbers of orders had exploded and that they were really busy. It's always been important to me to encourage local and small businesses that make original things. It's good for your local economy but also for the environment, and we all know that the biggest challenge right now is changing our habits and buying fewer cheap things that don't last. Small builders like me – and there are a lot of them – make things slowly and with care and are often a better choice."

What's next for Millimetric Instruments?
"I have a lot of things in the works: two new models and a few updates on current designs and parts. I'm always trying to make my products better and always find little things to tweak. It'll take quite a while for the new models to arrive but I'm excited to share them soon. Keep your eyes on my Instagram and Facebook pages for teasers and details."

For more information, visit millimetric.ca

SOVTEK
DYLAN



SHOP TALK

JOSH SCOTT
JHS PEDALS

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

While working as a gigging guitarist throughout the Southeastern United States, Josh Scott's love for the instrument bloomed into a talent for electronics and design that he barely knew he possessed

"It's almost like Mars," says Josh Scott, founder and proprietor of JHS Pedals, of rural northwest Alabama, where he spent his childhood. "If you're familiar with that life, it's a fun and awesome one. But you live out on land by yourself and there's not a lot else to do, so you develop hobbies. My dad raised horses; I was a total basketball nut."

To put a name to it, "out" means Belgreen, Alabama, a small farm town about 30 miles south of Muscle Shoals. This was definitive country life, where Scott attended the same school from age five to 18, and graduated with a class of 30 students.

"If you're an introvert like me," he says, "you just kind of pick a thing and you have blinders on and do it. I'm 6'6" and I loved basketball. I grew up watching the [Boston] Celtics with my dad – Larry Bird and all that – and that's what I thought I was going to do."

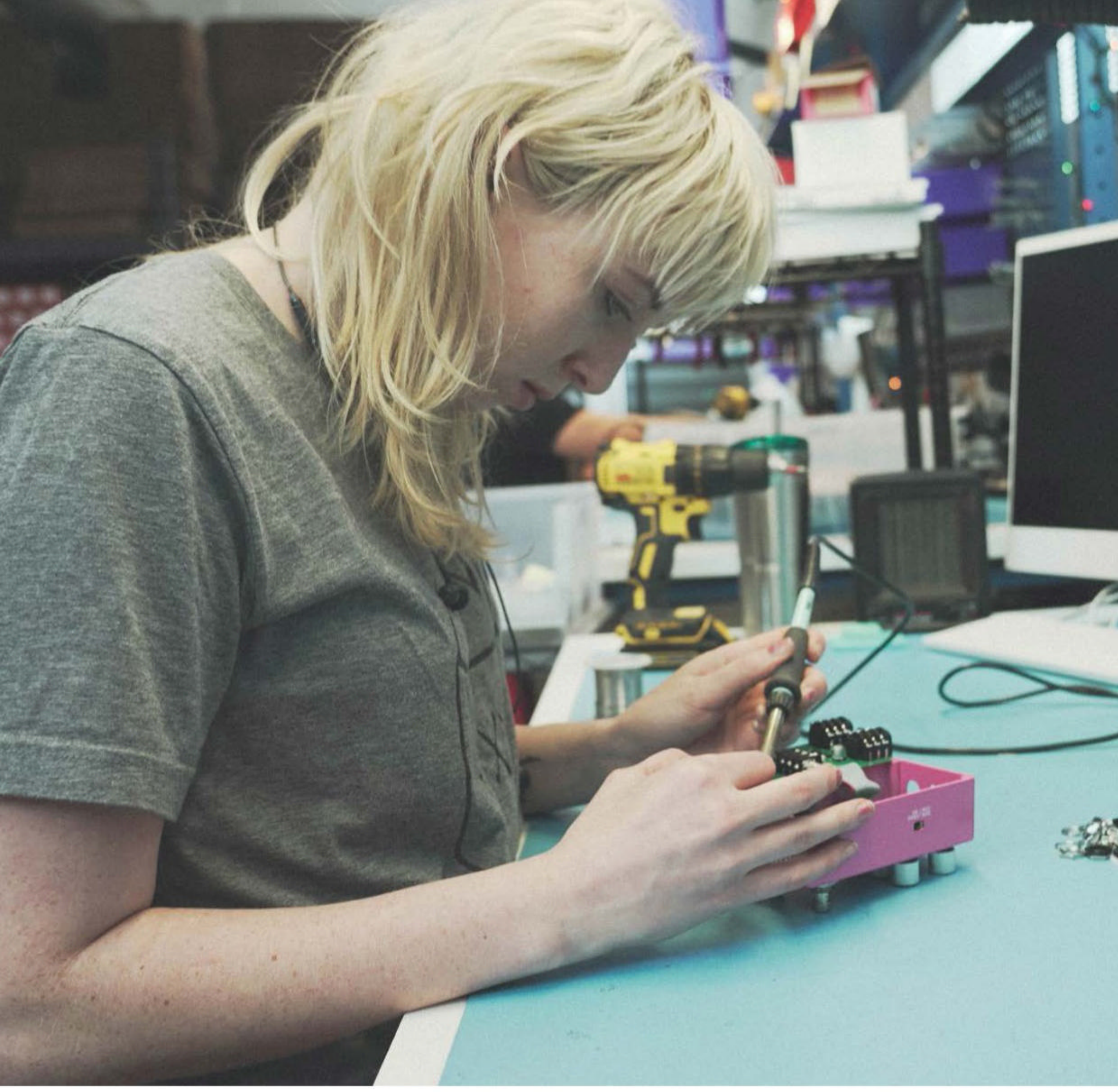
Ah, but how many youthful dreams of sporting prowess have been irrevocably pierced by the discovery of that age-old, hormone-addled teen-corruptor, rock 'n' roll?

COMING ALIVE

And, so often, that dream thief is let in through the window by a worldly older sibling. In Scott's case, it was an older brother who lived in 'town', such as it was, with whom he'd often stay during summer.

"I'd be sitting on the floor," says Scott, "and he had this huge collection of cassette tapes, right as CDs were becoming a thing, so he had the remnants of being an 1980s kid with all the cassettes, just an insane collection. I think that's where I got my pedal-collecting mentality from. But Pearl Jam's *Ten* was sitting on a pile – with Depeche Mode, The Cure, all the stuff he listened to – and I put it in, hit play, and it was the song *Alive*. I just remember loving the sound of the guitar and then the solo part, which, in hindsight, is like Jimi Hendrix meets grunge, you know, the Mike McCready thing.

"I went home and I was like, 'Mom, I want to get a guitar!' We'd get all our groceries at [bulk-buy outlet] Sam's Club and we got a guitar there. It was a cherry red Synsonics Strat copy, with a 1x8 solid-state amp,



one of those 'if it rains on it, it will evaporate' kind of things. So that guitar sat in my room for a while and I didn't know how to tune it but I got really into music: Pearl Jam, Soundgarden's *Superunknown*, Everclear, Nirvana – and Kurt Cobain had already died by this point so I was late to the party. Then I went back. I remember getting *The Cream Of Eric Clapton*, and then went way back and got into Hendrix.

"I remember I thought I'd learnt *Purple Haze*, or some fashion of it, and went and showed my mom, and she was like [adopts indulgent mum voice], 'That's really nice, Josh', But yeah, that's kind of how it started. Hacking away, watching MTV videos and trying to watch their fingers."

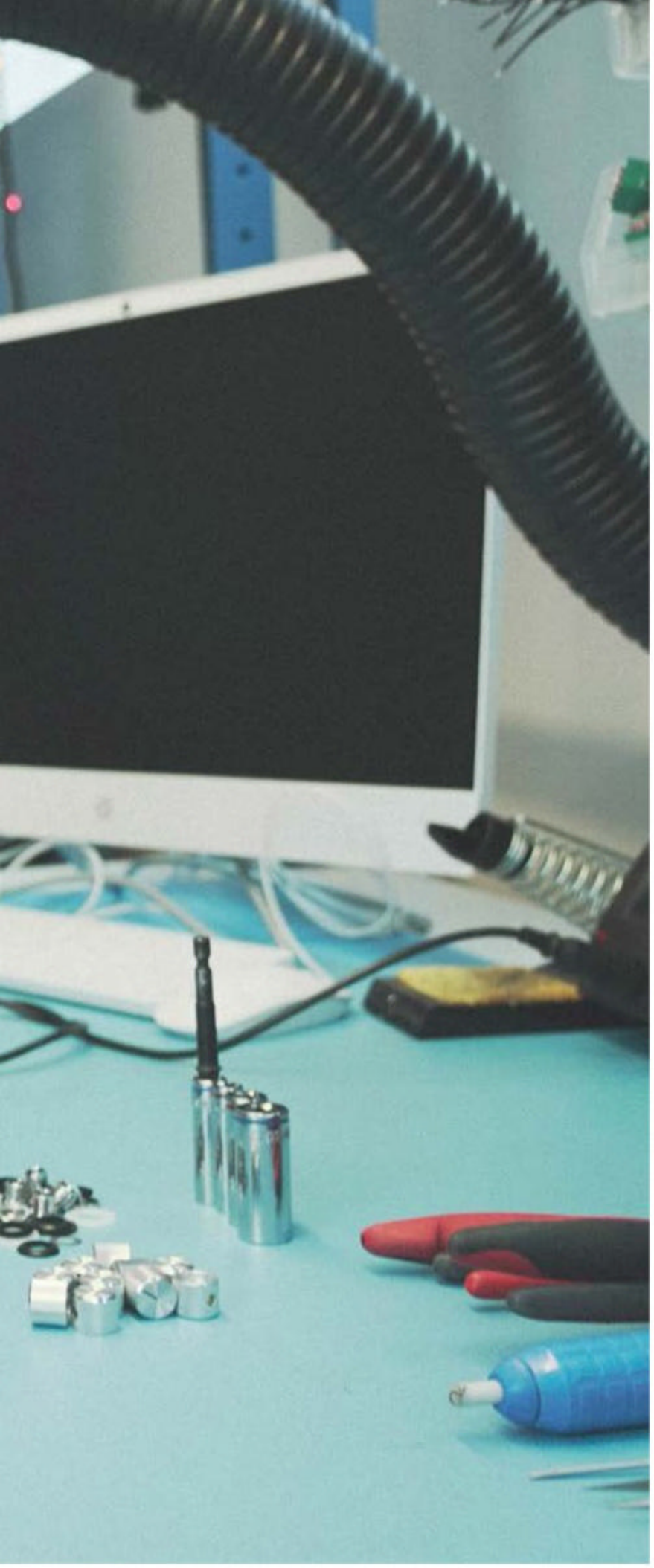
IT'S JUST ELECTRONICS

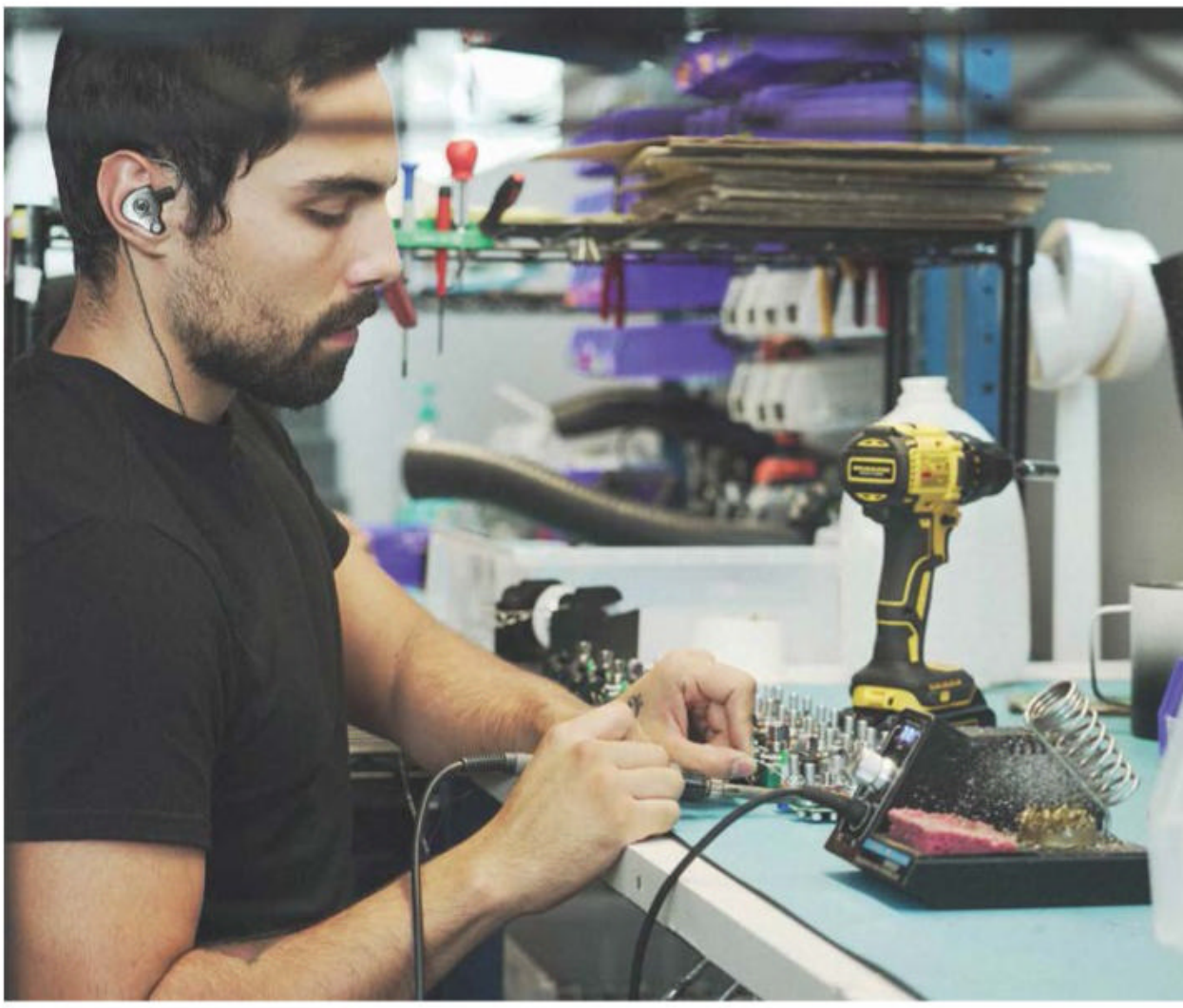
By his late high school years, Scott was good enough on the guitar to join an established band that played throughout the region. It began to look like a career.

"We made a lot of money," he says. "We played all the clubs in the Muscle Shoals area. As you know, Muscle Shoals is where all the historic Dylan, Rolling Stones, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Allman Brothers and other records were made, so there was a lot of music in that area. We would play the dive bars, talent competitions, all that stuff."

The cover-band gig eventually graduated to songwriting and some session work – "playing guitar for a couple of other bands that needed people, playing jingles, just learning what the studio was like" – which segued to some engineering and producing, and a growing fascination with audio electronics and, as Scott puts it, "how sound worked".

"I fixed and modified a Boss pedal," says Scott, "and, at this time, I used Robert Keeley's modified Blues Driver next to a stock Blues Driver – I would have used two Keeleys but I probably couldn't afford it – and when I fixed that stock one I was just like,





“I BUILT A FUZZ PEDAL AND I BUILT A BOOSTER. I KEPT MODDING STUFF AND EVENTUALLY UNDERSTOOD THAT THESE DIODES ARE LITTLE DISTORTION MONSTERS. YOU COULD CHANGE THEM OUT TO MAKE THE PEDAL CLIP DIFFERENTLY”

‘Why does Robert’s sound different?’ So I took them apart and just by a bare-bones process of elimination figured out what did what.

“I started tinkering. I would break things, then I’d go to Radio Shack or get on the internet and find, you know, ‘DIY Fuzz Face’ or whatever. I built a fuzz pedal and I built a booster. I kept modding stuff and eventually understood that if I changed this capacitor, it’d affect the bass response, and that these diodes are little distortion monsters and you could change them out to make the pedal clip differently – I still wasn’t learning anything about electronics but my ear was learning what things did and that’s really all you need to do.”

For Scott, as it has been for so many budding pedal and amp makers, the discovery of the magic roadmap that widely available schematics presented helped to flip the big switch in his mind, encouraging him to keep testing and tinkering.

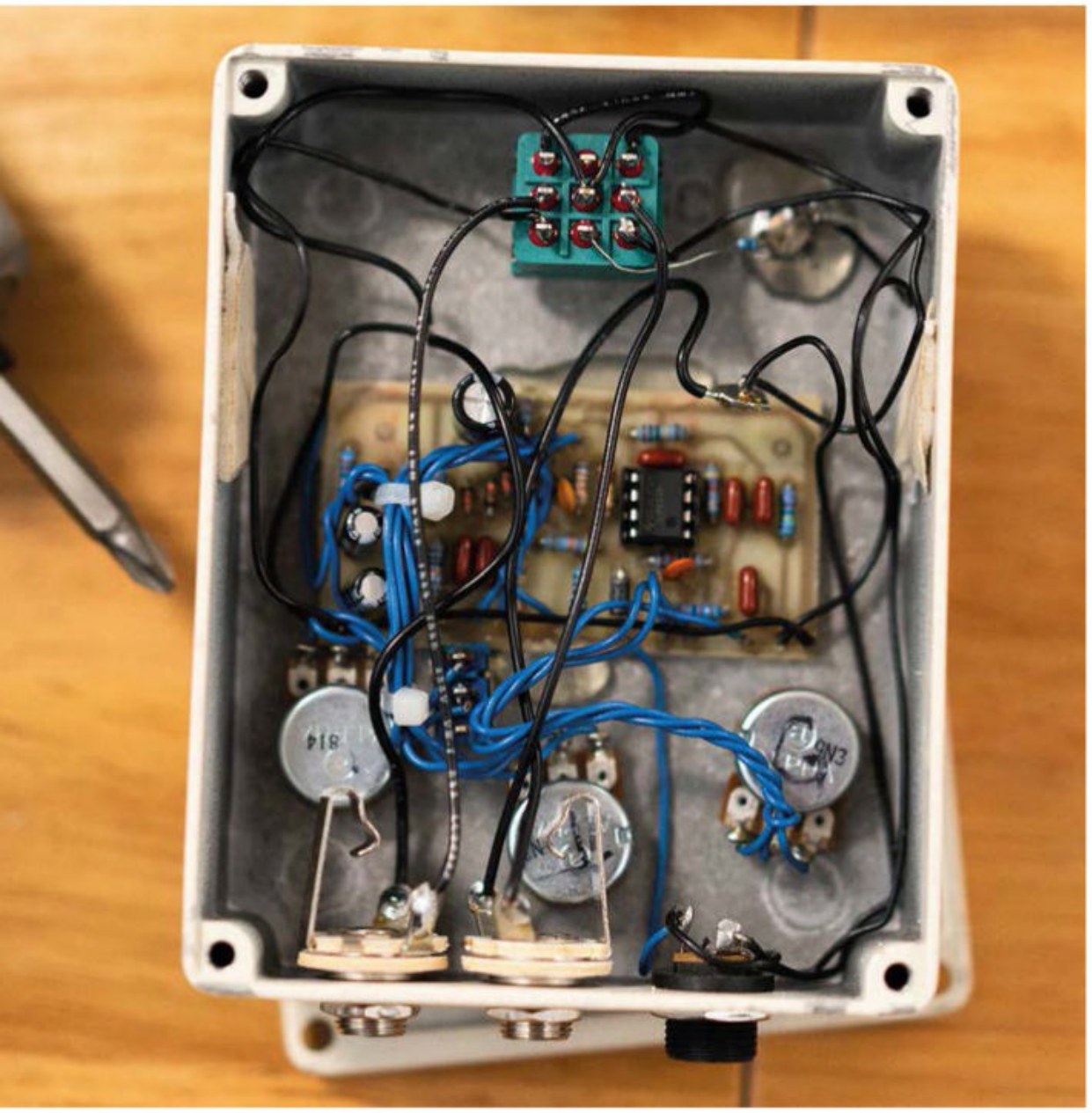
“It’s like a treasure map,” he says. “It’s something where you go, ‘Man, I actually did that!’ And it wasn’t witchcraft, you just figure it out and do it. You don’t have to be Tesla. It’s just electronics.”

Josh Scott now oversees 31 employees at his company’s Missouri headquarters

I CAN TOTALLY DO THIS

While Scott’s pedal explorations had begun as little more than a hobby, by the mid-2000s the increasing domesticity of his life was pushing him towards finding a way to make a living in some other way than constant gigging and studio work. Scott and his wife married in 2003. By 2007, they had a baby on the way. The pedal modifications had become a decently profitable sideline by this point and, if not for the inherent risk in any small business venture, they were looking more and more like they might provide the means of a steady day job.

“My wife and I had moved to Jackson, Mississippi, by this time,” says Scott, “and I would go down to the Guitar Center there and buy Boss pedals and mod them. There was a shop in the Fondren section of Jackson called Fondren Guitars – he’s still there and he has the first pedal I ever built – and I also started selling them on eBay. I made this little green logo, put it on there and they just kept selling and selling. That’s when I first thought, ‘I’m going to sell these on the side. This will never be a job, that’s absurd. I don’t want it to be. I’m just going to keep playing guitar, doing what I do…’”



“THE COLOUR BOX WAS ALMOST LIKE MY EVEREST. I REMEMBER TELLING PEOPLE AND THEY’D JUST GLAZE OVER. WE KNEW IT WAS GOING TO BE $400, AND THAT’S SUICIDE”

From humble beginnings, JHS has grown into a market-leading pedal brand

But the pedals wouldn’t stop selling. By 2008, Scott had started developing more original models, pedals that became the Morning Glory, the Pulp ’N’ Peel compressor and the All American, his take on the RAT. Unlike his early modded DS-1s, these were built from scratch and stamped with the JHS logo.

“The pivotal moment,” says Scott, “came right when my daughter was born. I remember sitting in the parking lot of a Walgreens and my wife had seen how much I was working on this – probably 25 hours a week working at a little card table, burning holes in it soldering pedals. And I was like, ‘Wow, I’m making decent money!’ So I told her, ‘I’m just going to see how many of these I can sell, say no to some other gigs and stuff’. She was slightly panicked but said to me, ‘Do you really think you can make a living and provide?’ And I did not know but I said in a split second, ‘Absolutely. I can totally do this’. For me, that was the moment where I went all-in.

“It was treacherous! I was working out in this little woodshed. I had moved everything out there and I would literally work 16, 18 hours a day – nosebleeds from not ventilating solder and stuff. And then when you have a kid, you’re like, ‘Oh, crap, I really do have to make this work!’”

GOING TO KANSAS CITY

Scott and his burgeoning business moved north to Kansas City, Missouri, in 2009. JHS entered a period of rapid growth soon after and has remained there ever since. Making one hire after another to help meet demand, Scott now heads an organisation that totals 31 employees.

“It’s a total accident that was incredibly hard to do,” he says, laughing. “I mean, it was hard and it’s still hard but there were years when… from 2009 to 2013 or so was so hard. I didn’t know anything about business. My parents grew up in a large farm family, didn’t graduate high school – we don’t sit around the dinner table and dad’s talking about his portfolio, you know? It just wasn’t like that. My dad’s a furniture-repair guy. My mom was a cafeteria worker. They worked really hard. I had no skillset for this and those first years were brutal.

“A lot of people ask advice, because somehow we’ve made our name – and I don’t take that lightly. I take it humbly because I know how hard it is. People ask, ‘What do I do? How do I make it?’ And I always say, ‘Just stick around’. You can make great gear but you’ve got to get beyond that – and it’s difficult. I’ve just been fortunate with a good team that carries all the weight of the things that I’m bad at.”

Also carrying the weight, however, has been a compelling line of superb-sounding pedals, which has driven JHS’s surprisingly rapid ascendency into the upper echelon of the high-end pedal market, something we might previously have called ‘the boutique market’ were it not for the greater-than-boutique size of the company itself.

Scott credits the Morning Glory with launching the company but adds that every pedal that JHS puts out could considered be a Josh Scott signature, since they all stem from effects that he personally would like to play. But when asked to name one pedal that sums up the self-imposed challenge of taking it to the next level once the company’s feet were firmly on the ground, he immediately points to the impressive Colour Box, a 2012 release that saw him combine preamp, EQ, fuzz, overdrive and distortion in a single DI-ready stompbox.

“The Colour Box was almost like my Everest,” says Scott. “I remember pitching the idea and telling people what I was working on and they’d just glaze over. We knew it was going to be this $400 pedal – and that’s suicide. But it was our best-selling pedal for several years. It sold out all the time, backorders in the hundreds. That’s just crazy. I’m still in awe that it worked.”

Listed among other JHS successes are the Muffuletta fuzz and the Bonsai overdrive, the latter designed following an inside joke made with fellow pedal designer and manufacturer Brian Wampler during their joint appearance on a discussion panel. If every respectable maker has their own version of the Tube Screamer, how do you make yet another? The answer: make nine in one. The Bonsai's nine-way rotary selector even points to a setting with the Keeley logo, designating a Keeley-modified TS.

THE CIRCLE TURNS

Of the more recent JHS offerings, Scott professes a love for the Paul Gilbert Signature distortion and an appreciation of the experience of working with the man himself. "Man, he's so redeeming," says Scott. "He's an amazing guy and that pedal was such a blast to work on. Just becoming friends with him… he reminds me to enjoy the guitar. You know how it is, you just get to where you're like, 'I play guitar, blah blah'. It becomes like this extra limb. But he reminds me that, wow, the guitar is fun!"

Plenty of fun was inspired by the intervention of another guitar star – with an assist from a popular British YouTube duo – without whom another of JHS's most enduring and beloved pedals might have bitten the dust. The Angry Charlie, which Scott describes as "my version of what I wish the Marshall Guv'nor had been", was on the chopping block in 2014, having logged mediocre sales at a time when JHS production was struggling to keep up with all the models in its rapidly growing catalogue.

"Then, I remember coming in one morning and Steve [Offutt], who's now our general manager, said, 'Dude, we're getting gobs of orders for these Angry Charlies!'," Scott recalls. "I was like, 'I don't know, nobody's ever played these'. There was no magic; the pedal had always sounded great, it just hadn't sold well. Basically, I learnt that That Pedal Show had shown it, and that they had seen it from Andy Timmons, who had walked into his local guitar shop, the Guitar Sanctuary, and the guy was like, 'Hey, Andy, you need to use this'. It just blew up, because of That Pedal Show and because Dan [Steinhardt] builds the Radiohead rigs and it goes into those. It was out-of-nowhere chaos. It's still hard to believe."

Having progressed through complex pedals such as the Colour Box and the multi-mode Bonsai, Scott says he believes the pedal market is cyclical and that simplicity is coming back. If the likes of Strymon represents the peak of post-boutique complexity, Scott sees a wave of renewed desire in basic pedals beginning to crest again.

"We put out this Legends Of Fuzz line," he says, "and we will close in on 10,000 units in a year. For us, that's staggering – and it's just simple fuzzes. I get asked a lot, 'Do you think pedals will survive all this amazing modelling stuff?' And I reply, 'Absolutely!' I laugh at myself because I have so many guitars but every time I pick up a Telecaster, it's just, 'Ahhh!' It's like 1952, man – the thing's no different. Or I plug into a Bassman and it's like, 'Ah, yeah, there we go'."

For more information, visit jhspedals.info

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DIY WORKSHOP

HÖFNER VIOLIN BASS RESTORATION

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

The action is sky-high, it won't play in tune and the neck is coming off. But don't break out the violins just yet because this Höfner 500/1 is getting a second chance to twist and shout

1 The Höfner's action is unacceptably high and the fretboard is pointing straight at the neck pickup

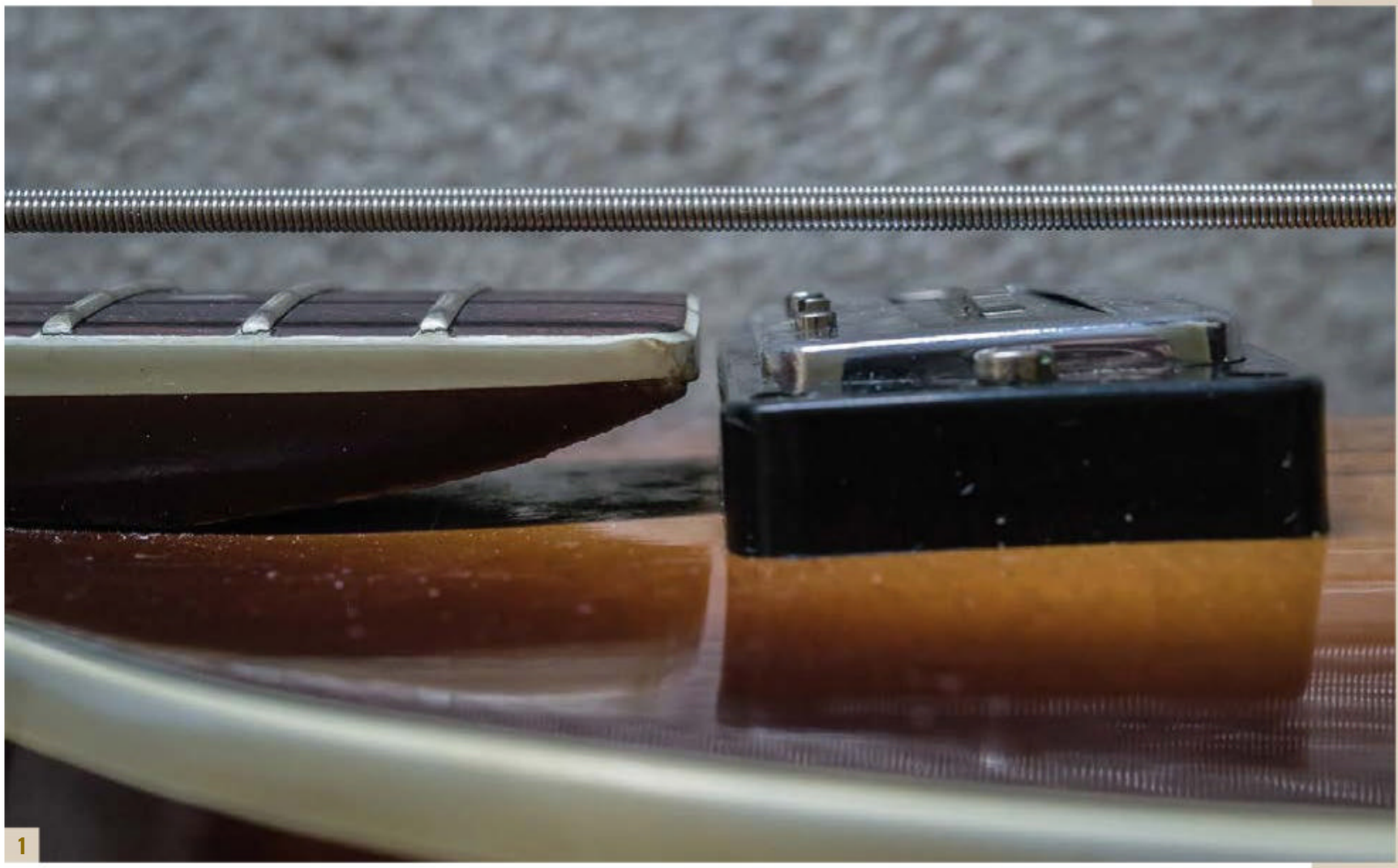
2 When a bridge is set as low as it can go but the action is too high, it's a sign that there's something wrong

3 Running a ruler across the top of the frets, it hits the side of the bridge, so there's no doubt that a neck reset is required here

4 A gap between the heel and the body is another surefire sign of trouble

5 The gap is so wide that a folded piece of paper can be pushed in easily

6 The 17th fret is removed and holes are drilled for a needle to direct steam into the neck joint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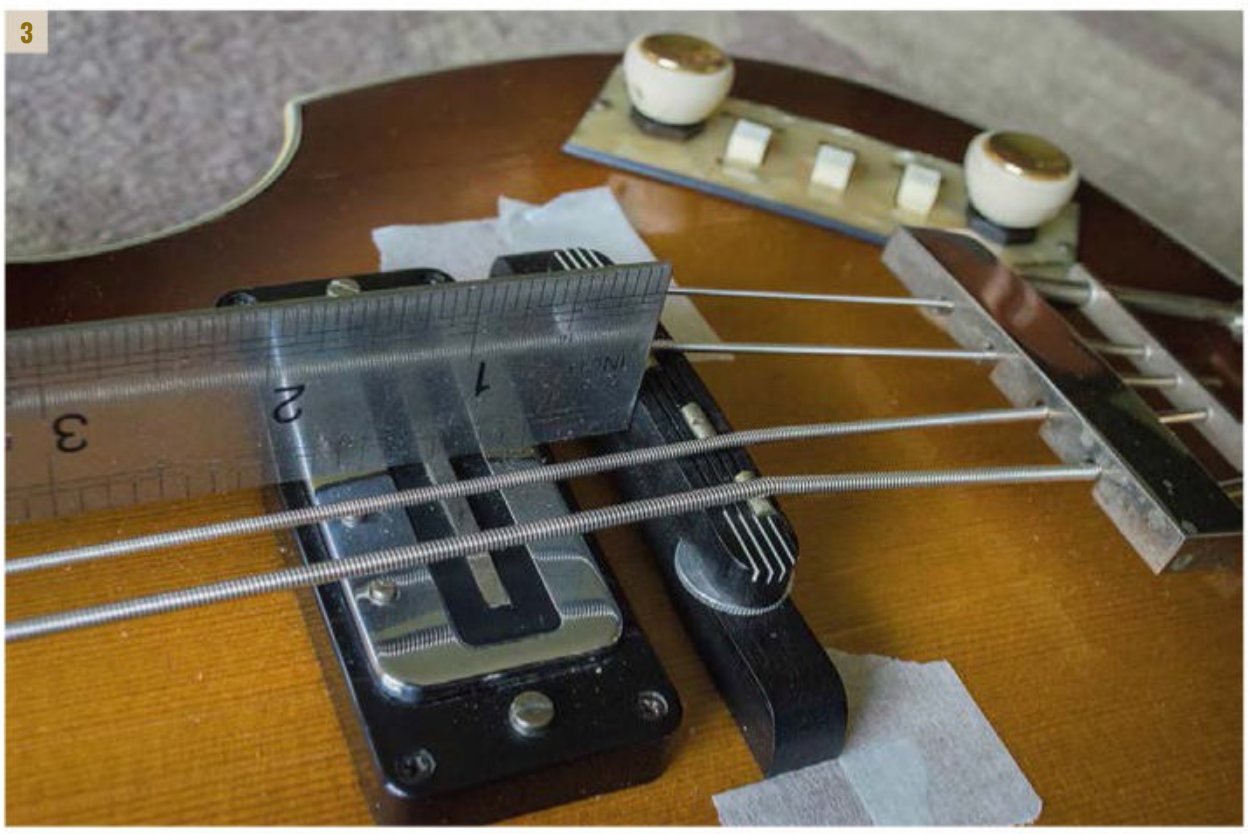
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Guitarists and bassists may be breeds apart but there is some degree of crossover, and there are a handful of four-stringed instruments that most guitarists regard as cool. Topping that list are vintage Fender Precision and Jazz Basses, the Rickenbacker 4001 and this, the Höfner 500/1. It's probably no coincidence that Paul McCartney famously played two of them.

Of course, he's most closely associated with the Höfner – commonly known as the Violin Bass due to its body shape. Paul bought his first one, his all-time favourite, in the Steinway music shop in Hamburg in 1961. It's the one he played during The Beatles' residency at The Top Ten Club after he switched from guitar to bass, and at all those Cavern Club gigs.

Höfner gave him another bass in 1963 but Paul is on record as saying his first 500/1 remained his favourite and he was still using it during the filming of *Let It Be*. But the 'Cavern Bass' disappeared shortly afterwards and its whereabouts remain unknown. No wonder his '63 Höfner is reportedly insured for £4m.

The Höfner 500/1 we're featuring here isn't one of Paul's and its owner bought it many years ago while working in the US. Examining the features is the best way to date it. In 1965, Höfner introduced a wider control panel that was followed in 1967 by bar-blade pickups and a flat transfer logo. The heel shape was altered in 1968. Since this Höfner ticks all those boxes, we're confident it dates from 1968 or later.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The main reason I'm working on this bass is its failing neck joint. Höfner bass necks were set into the bodies using hide glue, and decades of fluctuating temperatures and string tension have conspired to ruinously weaken the construction of this one.

There are two telltale signs to look for, especially if you're in the habit of buying vintage basses and guitars online.

When a set-neck instrument has its bridge set as low as it can possibly go but the action is noticeably high, there is cause for concern. Try running a straight edge along the top of the frets to the bridge – a long metal ruler will do fine. The ruler should end up being a fraction above the bridge. If the bottom edge hits the side of the bridge, things could get expensive. Examine the heel of the neck closely too. If you notice a gap between the heel and the body, it's an indication that the neck joint may be failing. Even a small and seemingly insignificant gap at the heel can translate to calamitous playability problems.

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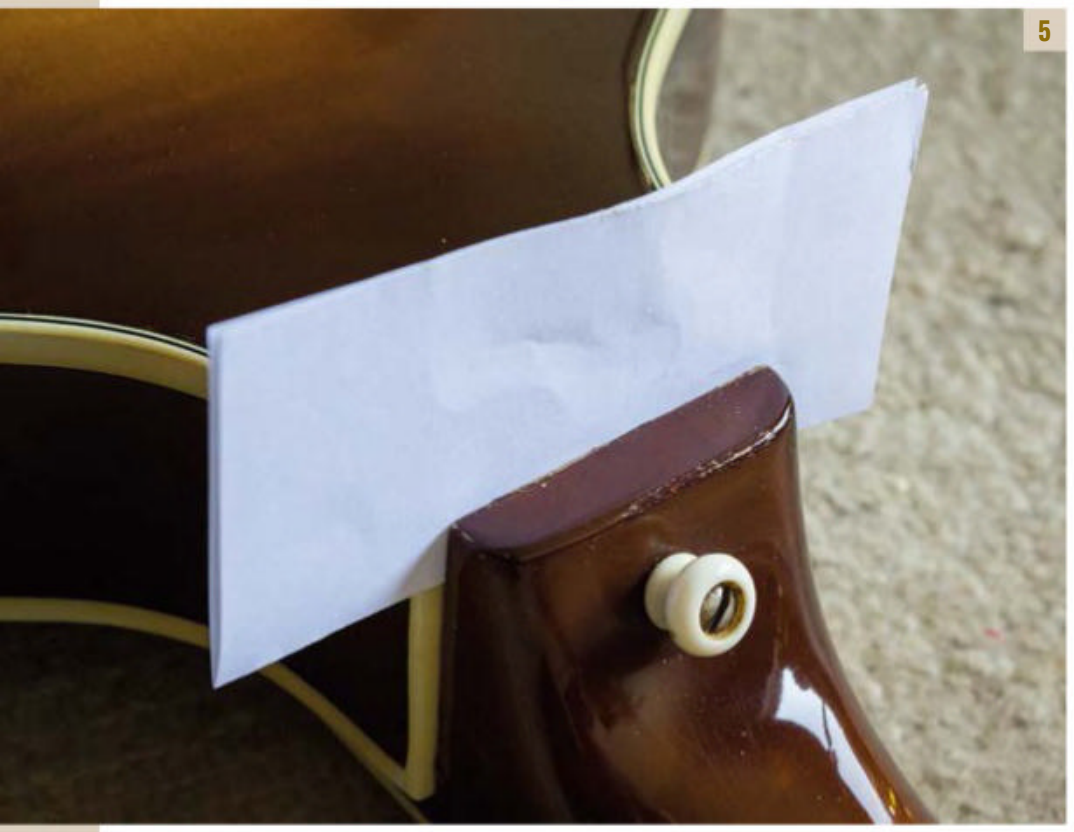

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There's no doubt that this bass needs a neck reset because the straight edge running across the top of the frets actually touches the top of the bridge pickup and I'm able to slide a piece of paper into the gap between the heel and the body quite easily. This neck has to come off. But first, there are some other details that must be addressed.

Beneath the fingerboard extension – the bit that floats above the body – there appears to be a lot of glue squeeze-out. It would risk the finish to blast that area with steam directly, so instead I decide to remove the glue in an altogether different way. I lay masking tape down each side of the neck to protect the body and use a flush-cut saw to break through the glue. The sound quickly changes from a crystalline crunch to the softer and more familiar tone of saw teeth on wood and, the moment that happens, I stop sawing.

The strap button is secured through the heel. This can cause problems if a long screw has been used, so removing the strap button is always a sensible precaution. The strings need to come off too but Höfner basses have floating bridges, so I mark the bridge position with low-tack masking tape before slackening off the strings. It's likely the bridge will need repositioning once the neck has been reset but at least the tape provides a starting point.

Since this is my first time resetting a Höfner bass neck, I conduct some research and discover a fabulous YouTube resource for Höfner owners called Backbeat Vintage. I learn that the 17th fret has to be removed in order to drill holes through the empty fret slot into the neck joint. The holes are needed for a StewMac injection needle that connects to a pipe and a steam generator. Hide glue will release when subjected to water and heat and this is the only way to get steam into that joint.

Before removing the fret, I mark the treble side with a pen so that I know which way around it goes when I put it back in following the reset. I'll often apply solder when heating a fret prior to removal but that would render this fret unusable. I'm aware that vintage Höfner fret tangs have tiny barbs, so I try extracting it with my fret-removal tool without heating it, and it lifts out easily without damaging the 'board.

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I measure in about 10mm from the edges of the rosewood fretboard to mark the locations for my needle holes. With a 2mm diameter bit in my electric drill, I start the holes with the drill operating in reverse to minimise chip-out. Once I'm a few millimetres down, I switch the drill to its usual direction and continue drilling until the bit hits what feels like an air gap. When doing this, it's always sensible to mark on the drill bit the maximum depth you can safely go to. Needless to say, drilling through the back of the body would be something of a disaster.

I use a small steam cleaner as a steam generator, with the needle connected via a length of hose that's secured by hose clips at both ends. I place the Höfner down on a soft towel and make sure to have plenty of absorbent kitchen paper at the ready.

I have steamed off several necks in the past and I know it pays to be patient, and to mop up standing water before it soaks into the finish and fretboard. I also stuff a towel inside the body adjacent to the neck block to prevent the body from filling up with steam and water. I alternate the needle between the two drilled holes and, after several minutes, steam begins to emerge from the bottom and sides of the neck joint.

Having watched the procedure online, I'm expecting the neck to lift upwards. However, it doesn't appear to be ready to move. I'm beginning to feel slightly concerned until it dawns on me to try to slide the neck out lengthways. This way, it begins to move almost immediately and the neck comes away from the body cleanly. I clamp the neck to a long radius block to keep it straight as it cools and dries, and take the opportunity to scrape the residual hide glue off the bare wood.

Having never attempted a Höfner bass neck reset before, I should've done a little more research. The neck wouldn't lift out because these are fixed with a mortise and tenon joint rather that the dovetail I was expecting. At some point during the 1960s, Höfner must have changed from one to the other – probably when the heel changed. If I'd been paying closer attention when sawing through the glue, I would have realised that the blade was nowhere near as deep as the 17th fret.

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7 Masking tape protects the body and a flush-cut saw is used to break through glue under the 'board extension

8 The steam needle is alternated between the holes and excess water is immediately wiped away

9 Earlier Höfners had dovetail neck joints but later in the 1960s, they moved to this style of mortise and tenon

10 Teflon is placed in the fret slot to plug one side of a steam-needle hole

11 Rosewood dust and Super Glue is used to plug the hole and the Teflon keeps the slot clean

12 When sanded flush, the plugged hole is harder to spot

HITTING RESET

Höfner cut its mortise and tenons with extreme precision. When test fitting the neck back into the body, it is extremely snug. I also notice that pressing the neck into the body from the top is quite challenging and it's better to slide it in lengthways – basically the same way that it came out.

The tightness of the joint combined with the long tenon means there's no side-to-side movement at all. The only thing I need to be concerned with is the neck's back angle. Pressing the neck in tight and clamping it, I once again run a straight edge down to the bridge to check that everything is as it should be. Thankfully, it's just about flush with the top.

Höfner's woodworking in this area was excellent and very little adjustment is required. I place some strips of 320-grit paper between the body and heel and draw them out to take a tiny bit of wood off the bottom of the heel and make sure the heel and body are in close contact along the entirety of the join line.

Once I'm happy that everything is going to line up and close up, I brush Titebond Original glue onto the mortise and tenon joint and clamp the body and neck together. After one final alignment check, I leave them to dry overnight.

SLOTTING IN

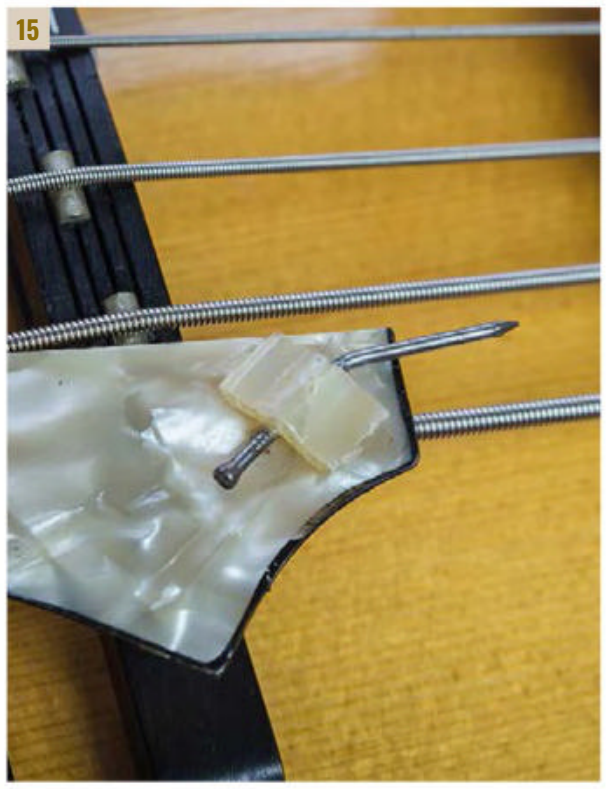
With the neck and body together again, it's time to put the missing fret back in. Needle holes are usually covered by the fret and that would've been the case here. However, the bass-side hole went slightly off centre. Rather than leave an obvious hole on show, I'm doing a partial fill.

StewMac sells pieces of Teflon that can be used as a barrier to Super Glue. I snip off a small section with scissors and squeeze it into the fret slot. Next, I drop some rosewood dust into the hole, add some Super Glue using a whip tip and then follow up with more dust and Super Glue. Once the glue has set hard, the Teflon lifts out easily and I sand the repair flush with the fretboard.

On the treble side, the needle hole went in dead centre, so fortunately I don't have to worry about packing that as well.

13 The 17th fret is reinstalled with the treble-side marking still visible but the needle holes are now hidden under the wire

14 The wiring is a mess so this is an opportunity to tidy things up



15 This crooked nail presses into a hole drilled into the side of the bridge base to secure the pickguard

16 The Violin Bass restored to its former glory

The edges of the hole will be visible if you look very closely but I'm leaving it like this because the bass will almost certainly need another neck reset one day. Hopefully the luthier who does it will notice that the neck has been reset previously and realise that there are already a couple of drilled holes there for a steam needle. You're welcome.

To replace the fret, I use my fret press clamp with a 9.5-inch radius caul, and the fret goes in tightly. The fretboard feels rough in texture and the frets are rather oxidised, so I give everything a once-over with 0000-grade wire wool and apply lemon oil to the 'board. Within minutes, all the oil has been soaked up, so I give it a second application because the rosewood is clearly very dry. After buffing it up, it looks and feels a lot nicer.

SOLDER AND STRINGS

The wiring has previously been worked on and the pickups weren't soldered directly onto the control panel. The ground connection also has an unnecessary join, so I set about tidying it all up before the strings finally go back on. A quick test demonstrates that both pickups are working but nothing on the control panel makes much sense. After checking online, however, I discover that it is all working normally. It's fair to say that the 500/1's controls aren't the most sensible in the world.

It seems the same can be said of the pickguard fixing mechanism, which relies on an unsecured L bracket and a couple of bent nails – one of which pokes into the bridge base. The positions where the bridge needs to be for intonation purposes and for the pickguard nail don't quite coincide. This may be one of the reasons that Höfner 500/1 players often remove their pickguards. This bass has been going commando for decades but its owner wants it refitted.

After restringing and tuning to pitch, the bass's action is far lower and I'm even obliged to adjust the bridge upwards. When the truss-rod is tightened to eliminate excess relief, the action drops even lower still. As I test the Höfner through a Universal Audio Ampeg plugin, I'm totally enthralled by its instantly recognisable 1960s bass tone. It's incredibly woody, deep and very clear. The 500/1 is also remarkably easy to play – even for occasional bassists such as me – and I'm sure the owner is going to have a great deal of fun with it. G

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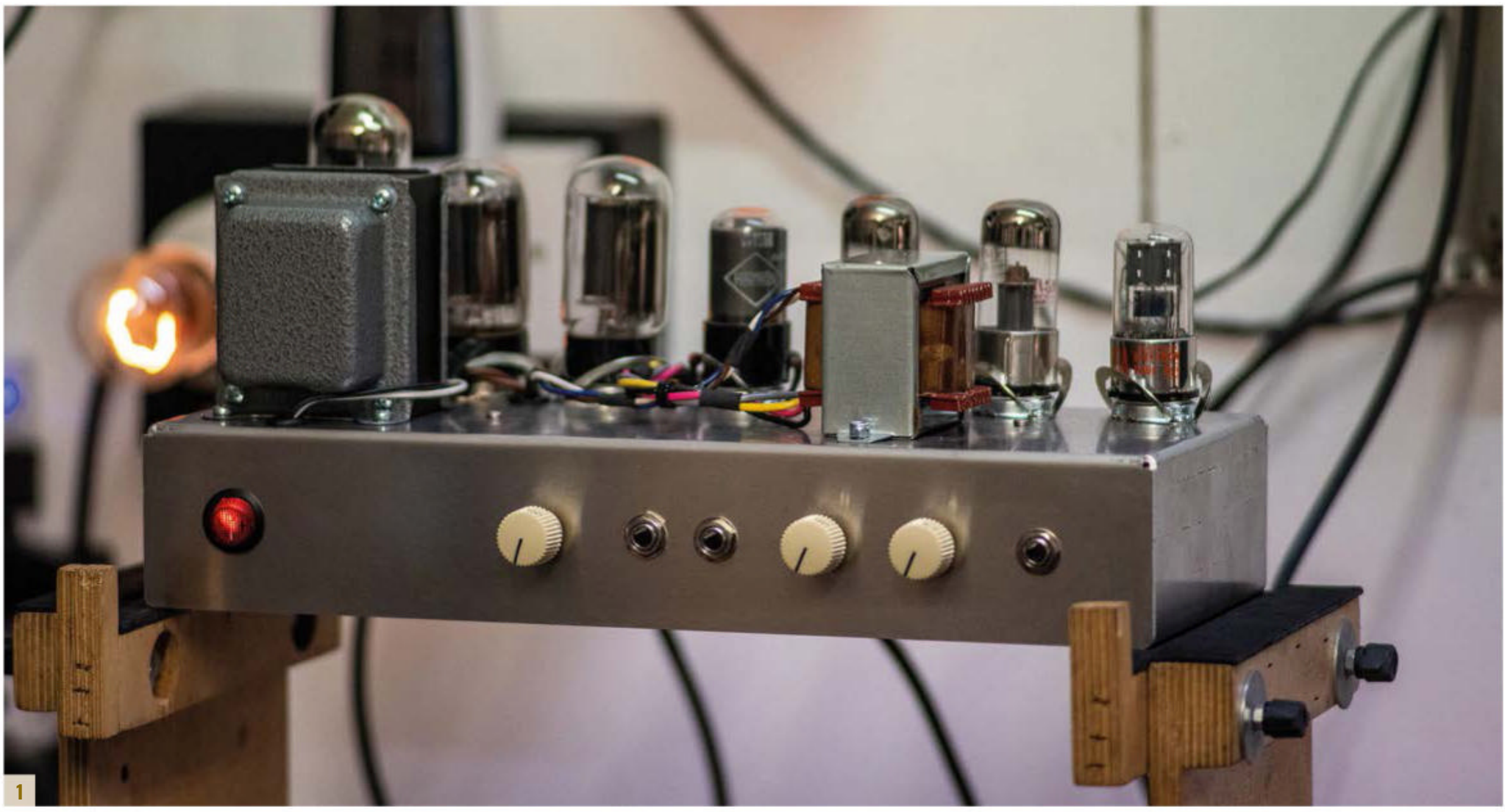
AMPLIFIER FAQ

As Rift boss Chris Fantana's Gibson EH-185 clone project comes to its conclusion, it's finally time to fire it up

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com



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Before we can apply mains voltage to our amplifier, it's paramount that we double-check our wire connections, both physically and with a continuity meter. Doing so will allow us to rest safe in the knowledge that all of our crucial high-voltage connections are in the right place, as well as ground connections. If I had mistakenly connected a high-voltage wire to the eyelet on the board, we could be in for a catastrophe.

Using a digital multi-meter set to continuity mode, I check every connection against my layout diagram to ensure that nothing is amiss. All of my grounds are in place, my signal wires connect to where they should and nothing is out of place. Good.

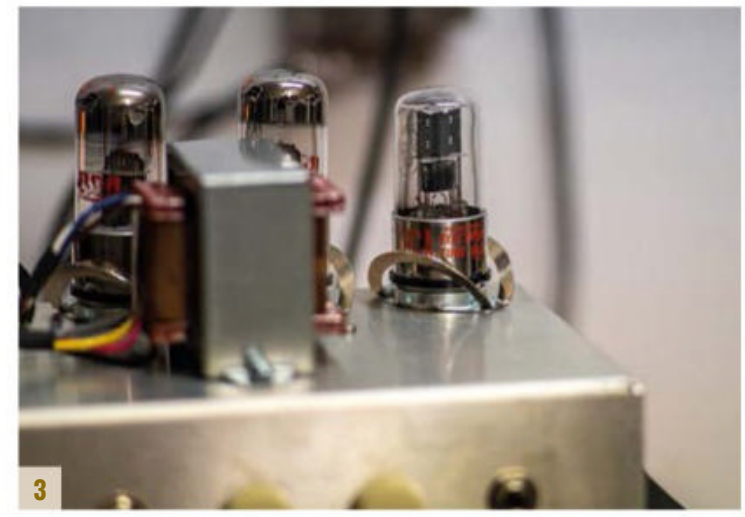
With the chassis now mounted on the test bench, I can apply voltage to the amplifier and check that voltages appear in the places that I want them to and not where I don't. I use a current-limiting device made using a 100-watt incandescent light bulb that can be switched in and out of the circuit. It sits in series with the live mains wire and will protect the amplifier should a fault current flow.

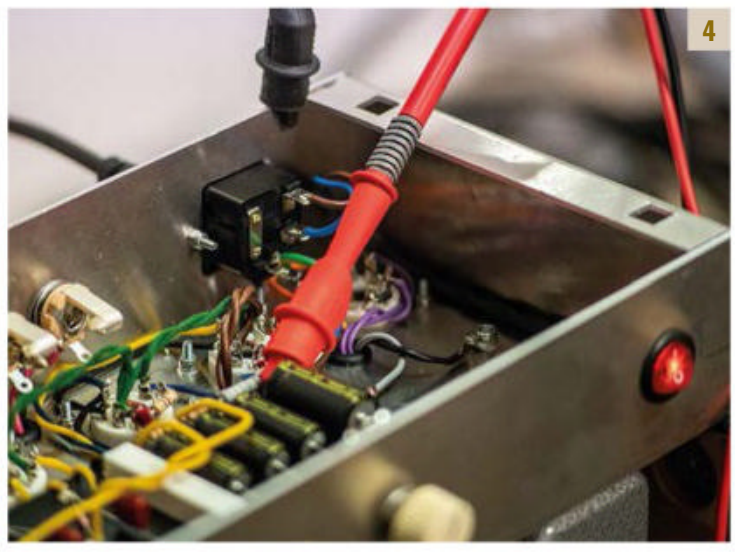
The filament of the light bulb increases resistance as more current flows through it and therefore self-regulates how much current the amplifier can draw. With 240 volts of mains voltage and a 100-watt bulb, simple Ohm's law (current = watts/voltage) tells us that no more than 416mA of current can flow at any time. The bulb also gives a useful visual indication of current flow, as it will glow brighter as the amplifier tries to draw more current.

As I apply power to the amplifier, the indicator light illuminates on the front panel and I can hear the power transformer humming away. Using a voltmeter, I check that the three secondary windings are producing the expected voltages and, when all is confirmed, I can switch the amplifier off in preparation for installing the valves.

NEW TUBES, OLD VALVES

The EH-185 uses valve types that are no longer being produced, which meant that I had to spend a few hours browsing internet auction sites and specialist suppliers to find our set. I discovered that langrex.co.uk had a trio of RCA 6SQ7s, all dated to 1965, as well as a Haltron 6N7 from 1966, and these would form a fantastic line-up for this particular amplifier. The 6L6 output and 5U4GB rectifier valves are modern production units from TAD and JJ, respectively.





The NOS valves from Langrex are tested on arrival and I find that the 6N7 results are unclear, so a matching replacement is quickly dispatched to me – quite a service! I begin by installing just the 5U4GB rectifier and fire the amplifier up again. This will energise the high-voltage rail and allow me to take further voltage measurements. The light bulb limiter starts to glow slightly, indicating that the amplifier is starting to draw a substantial current. With everything checking out, it's time to install the rest of the valves and flip the power switch for the final time.

PLAY TEST

Our EH-185 chassis is ready to play. Before I plug in a guitar, however, I check the operation of the amplifier on the oscilloscope to see whether it is passing signal and that there's nothing of concern going on. Thankfully, all seems to be okay, so I can connect a speaker to the output and grab a guitar. The 2x12 bench cabinet is somewhat overkill for this small 20-watt amplifier but it has both a wide bandwidth and lots of clarity, allowing for close examination of nuanced details.

We've got two channels on this amplifier, one microphone and one instrument. Plugging in an alder-bodied, rosewood-'board Fender Stratocaster loaded with '54 spec Monty's pickups into one of the instrument inputs, the resulting clean tone is warm, detailed and full-bodied. There's certainly a degree of harmonious marriage going on here as the tone and feel just seems to work. The bottom end is understandably loose with some pliability in the response but this is common with many pre-1960 amplifiers. Death metal thud and grunt, it is not.

It's easy to understand why jazz players love these amps; there's instant gratification in nailing fast runs of notes, as everything is clear and concise, while at the same time it delivers complex harmonic content. The sustain is there and quite impressive but, crucially, it doesn't it get in the way of the next incoming note. This channel rewards precise playing and fans of rich cleans. I try adding a little slapback delay and a bit of reverb to open up the sound and, boy, are we rewarded. Noodling around the fretboard is a joy and arpeggiated chords allow the harmonics to build up wonderfully. So far, this thing is a hit.

Switching over to the mic channel, it's a different affair. This channel has two extra gain stages and, even with low-output pickups, it's quite obvious that it's spicy hot. I grab a P-90-loaded Les Paul and discover that clean headroom is practically non-existent here. This, however, is a good thing. What you get instead are thick, creamy and throaty overdrive tones that can easily be dialled to suit your taste by tweaking the guitar's volume and tone controls.

I connect a 1x12 pine cabinet loaded with a 35-watt American-voiced speaker and find that the note edges now have a slight fuzzy character. This is what I've heard on many YouTube videos of original examples – mission accomplished.

I had an email from a reader asking what I plan to do next with this EH-185 project. I plan to keep refining the circuit, iron out the idiosyncrasies and make the design more player-friendly. The instrument channel is almost perfect but onboard spring reverb would really make it shine. The mic channel is fun to play but could do with a wider range of drive sounds – quite simply, it needs to be cleaner at lower settings, accelerating into its current level of madness as you turn it up. Playability is key these days, so that's my goal.

I've enjoyed this project. It's been fun to get stuck into something different and I've got a good starting point for development. Thanks for reading! G

Visit riftamps.com for more on Rift's range of British-built boutique amplifiers

1 The completed chassis running on the test bench

2 The RCA 6SQ7 and Haltron 6N7 valves were a fabulous find and perfect for this amplifier

3 The mic channel has two extra 6SQ7s for extra gain

4 Measuring the high-voltage rail inside the chassis

5 The current-limiting device on the test bench. The glowing light bulb indicates that the amplifier is drawing current

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TECH TALK

HOW TO MOVE HOUSE AND KEEP YOUR GUITARS INTACT

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

Got a long haul trip ahead of you? Here's how best to pack up your gear to ensure it travels safe

Like many other folks at the moment, my wife and I recently retreated from the Los Angeles area in favour of the greener pastures – both figuratively and literally – of my Pennsylvania hometown. More than 40 hours of driving later, here I am, writing from the colder climes of York (the American one), enjoying safer times with my parents with a positive outlook on the next chapter of our lives. Still, it's a mind-boggling experience to consider exactly how we got here.

I bet you're wondering what all this has to do with guitars. At last count, I own 19 of them, which is an overwhelming number. When I first moved to the West Coast, I had about seven and, at the time, even that seemed utterly untenable – but 19?! How was I ever going to safely ferry them the 2,600 miles to our destination?

This was the question at the front of my mind as I surveyed the boxes, soft cases, and hard shells cluttering the floor of our Long Beach apartment the week before we left. It was a daunting undertaking but with many years' experience shipping guitars, I was confident no harm would come to my instruments. Hopefully, documenting my experiences will help you if you ever attempt a similar move.

MAKING PREPARATIONS

My guitars are always well-kept and ready for action. They're clean, set up to my liking and in tune – even in their cases, in the event that I ever need to grab them and go. That's the curse and the blessing of being a guitar tech. Essentially, they're starting in the best possible condition.

Southern California is relatively stable as far as the weather goes. While the colder temperatures had just swooped in during the middle of October, generally my guitars rarely need more than a slight tweak as the seasons change. If you happen to live in an area with wild swings in temperature and humidity, it's a good idea to get them in top playing shape before your impending move, lest there be consequences.

Moving a neck with a drastic forward bow from one side of the country to the other, for example, could exacerbate the issue or even encourage a twist. Plus, if something does happen in transit, you'll be able to more easily identify the problem if you begin from a place of proper adjustment.

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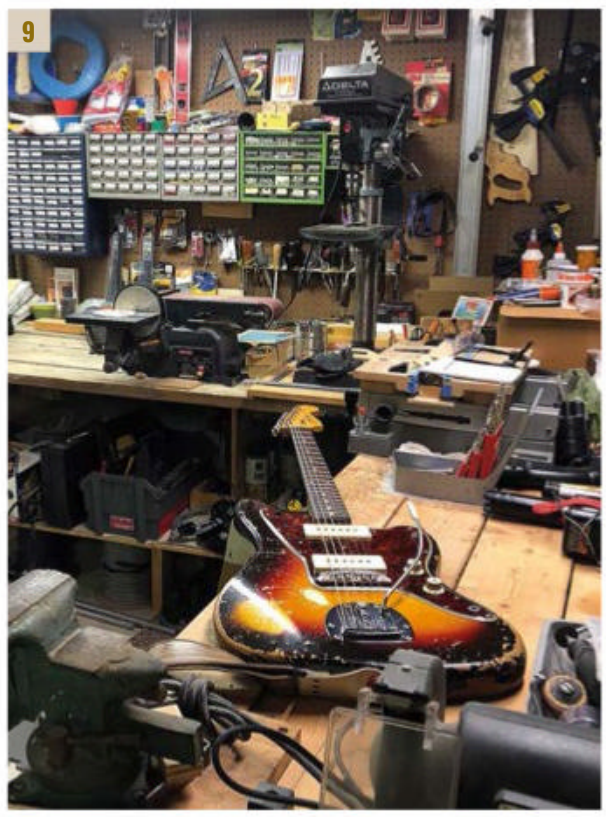

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1 Our big, beautiful U-Haul moving truck. Check out the parking job with the trailer attached – very proud

2 Our coast-to-coast route

3 My Creston Vader baritone exemplifies the normal state of being for most of my gear. I try to keep up with it

4 My ’82 Electra guitar packed safely in its case

5 My amps fit nicely into the void left between our fridge and vintage buffet

6 A test fit of my guitars loaded into the truck. This was not the final fit, as we later discovered even more stuff we had to take with us

7 Dog is my co-pilot

8 Most of my guitars will need tweaks as they acclimatise to their new home. I begin with my Yamaha Revstar 502T

9 My new basement work space has me very excited

PACKING UP

The first thing I did when it came time to load up was visually inspect each instrument one last time to pinpoint any problems that I may not have noticed before. It’s kind of like renting a car, when the representative takes a walk around and notes the dings, dents, scrapes and scratches. I kept a mental checklist all the while, and even plugged in for a moment of relaxation. Thankfully all was as expected.

Secondly, I detuned each instrument a full step to relieve a bit of the forward pull on the headstocks. This is something we always did at the guitar shop to ensure they’d arrive safely at their destination, minimising the chance of headstock breaks.

Thirdly, I made sure each guitar was secured in place in its case and, where the fit was less than ideal, I’d fill in the gaps with clean cloths or bubble wrap. I hesitate to use packing paper, as its rough texture can sometimes harm a guitar’s finish – not that you’d notice on some of my more well-used instruments.

LOADING THE TRUCK

I have to admit that my plans for packing the truck flew right out of the window the moment I saw the sheer amount of boxes, furniture and appliances we were actually taking with us. How can we accumulate so much over five short years and yet be totally unaware of it all? Did I freak out a little? Yes. Yes I did.

Instead of having their own secure area, the guitars went into the truck last, and were gently placed on top of our sewing table, pots and pans, games consoles, and clothing. In the end, I think that was the best place for them; after all, a sudden shift one way or the other and my guitars could have been firewood.

When it came time for the guitars, the solidbodies in hard cases (my Fenders in G&Gs) went in first, lining the bottom of their area for both support and protection. Next were the more fragile guitars in hard cases, including my Les Paul Studio and ’64 J-50, which I often think might close like a book if I even look at it the wrong way.

The J-50 was packed especially carefully and gently, with polish cloths to keep the neck firmly in place.

After that layer came the electrics in gigbags, comprised of a few Mono bags and some less sturdy types too. They were arranged in a single layer in a head-to-toe formation, like the interlocking teeth of a zip. Laid out this way, they were unable to shift around on the smooth shell of the hard cases below, and padded on each side by another soft case.

Lastly, I added the most fragile instruments of all on top of that flat layer, namely my wife’s ukulele and my Nashville-tuned Little Martin.

After a few more hours of cleaning and packing, down came the door and on went the lock, and we commenced our drive. We drove for 40 hours over the course of three days, catching a few hours’ rest at truck stops and highway on-ramps, and guzzling gallons of cold brew as quickly as the truck did gasoline as we waited for the next state line to pass beneath our feet.

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11

10 The neck has some back bow that needs to be dialled out

11 Removing the guitar's truss-rod cover

12 The truss-rod nut, exposed for adjustments

13 & 14 To check relief, it's best to use a capo on the first fret, then depress the last fret with your strumming hand.

12

13

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THE ARRIVAL

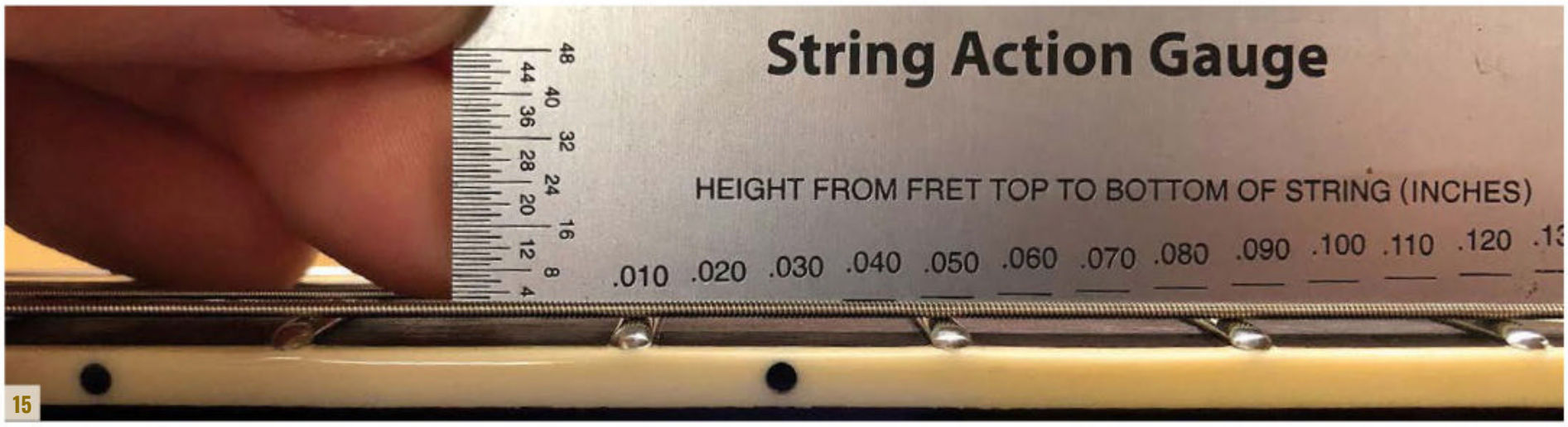
When we arrived at my parents' home in Pennsylvania, we were greeted with the sharp sting of clean, frigid air and the quietude of our rural sanctuary. After taking a few hours away from the rumble of our truck, my first order of business was to remove the guitars from the ice box of a cargo space. Indeed, it was cold enough that bringing them straight into the house, which my mother keeps toasty and dry during the winter months, wasn't feasible.

Shocking guitars with heat from the cold or vice versa can have adverse effects on finishes, causing the cracks and checking that we often see on vintage guitars. As most of my instruments are finished in nitrocellulose lacquer, I opted to play it safe and bring them only into the garage that evening, which tends to be a little warmer than outside but cooler than inside.

After spending the night in the garage, I brought the guitars into a back room and let them acclimatise. By the following day, they were all at room temperature and ready for any adjustments that might be required following their arduous journey.

GETTING ACCLIMATISED

Next came the process of setting up the guitars for their new East Coast lifestyle. Most are already exhibiting some excess relief, so I'll need to go through them and dial that out to ensure optimal playability. For now, however, I'm going to briefly touch on adjustment.



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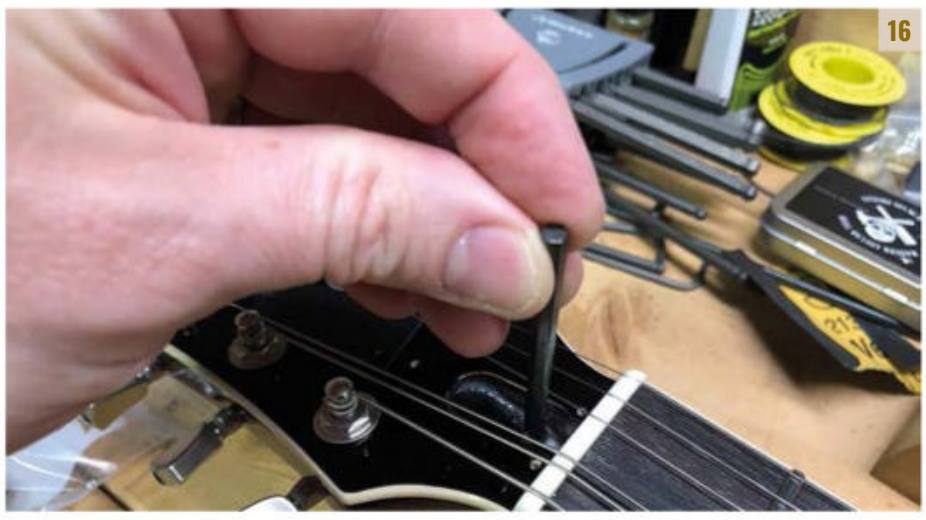

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15 Feeler gauges are ideal here but I haven't any at the moment. Using this string-action gauge at the 8th fret can at least give us a rough idea and, at the moment there's barely any relief to measure here

16 It's often best to make tiny adjustments, measure, then repeat if necessary. It only took about 1/4 of a turn on the rod to make a huge difference to the playability of this guitar

17 Now we have about .01"-.015" of relief at the 8th fret. Because I'm still getting used to this new guitar, I'll play it as is for a while and see how I feel

18 & 19 Some of my offsets waiting to be evaluated and adjusted as they get used to the weather here

I'm electing to use my Yamaha Revstar as my subject here, given the easy access to the truss rod and the fact that the guitar is still rather new to me. I haven't yet decided exactly how I want it to play, so this is a lesson for you as well as a valuable bit of fun for me.

Techs often use feeler gauges to measure neck relief. I generally do this by feel alone but, for the purposes of this article, I'll try to include measurements so you can get a sense of what I'm aiming for as I work.

Currently, the neck is pitching backwards a bit in the first position and, as you can see, there's barely any relief at all in the middle of the fretboard. It's rattling something fierce too and I want that all straightened out. With about a quarter turn of the rod using the included Allen key, you can see that some light now passes beneath the strings at the 8th fret, and I'm measuring around .01 inches of relief.

Some players aim for more relief than I do and, depending on your playing style, more relief could be a boon to you. But I personally like to keep a relatively straight fretboard. Also, for most of my guitars, I aim for the low E between .05 inches and .06 inches above the 12th fret, and the high E between .04 inches and .05 inches.

With those adjustments made, I'll wait a while and see how the guitar continues to settle in, then revisit. Now, it's time for another nap. Moving is rough!

Follow Mike on Instagram @puisheen

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ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PLAY BLUES LIKE **JOE BONAMASSA**

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

Joe's slick fusion of blues and rock makes him one of the most fiery and exciting guitar players on the planet. Here's how to nail his style

Since breaking through with his first solo album 20 years ago, Joe Bonamassa has established himself as not only one of the most respected and talented electric guitarists of the modern era but also one of the most popular. None of this should be a surprise – Joe was marked out for big things early on.

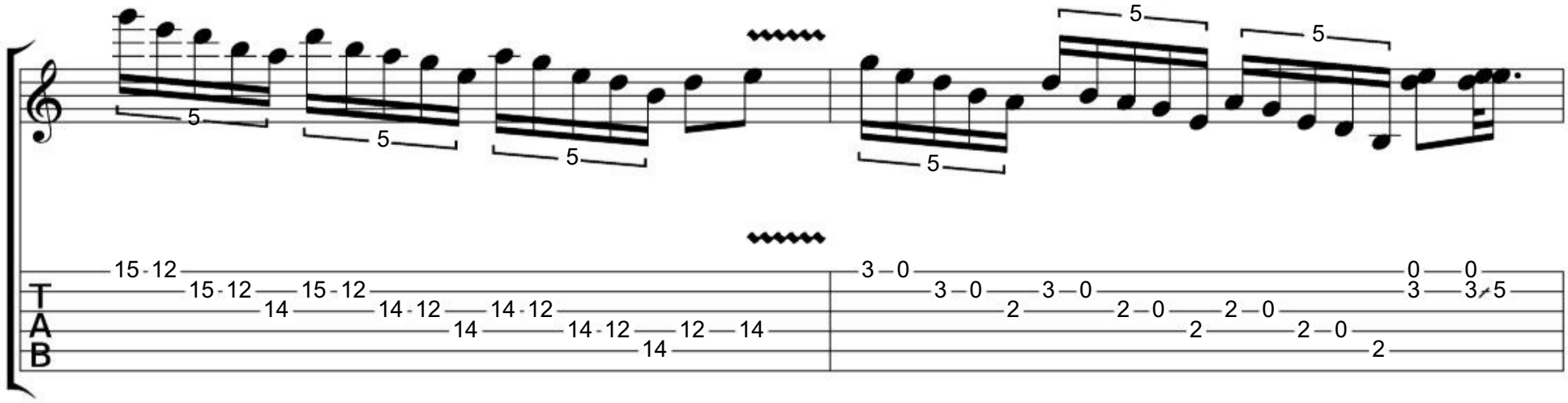
At the age of 11 he was being mentored by the legendary Danny Gatton and, at 12, he supported BB King on tour. So it's little wonder that in the three decades since, Joe's proved that he's one of the most blistering blues-rock players ever.

In this lesson, we'll take a look at Joe's playing style – which draws heavily from both the British blues greats he idolised as a child, and the rock guitar heroes that followed them in the 1970s and 1980s – and show you how best to incorporate these tricks into your own guitar playing.

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face-to-face and via the MGR Music platform. He has more than 10 years of experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. To find guitar tutors in your area, visit mgrmusic.com

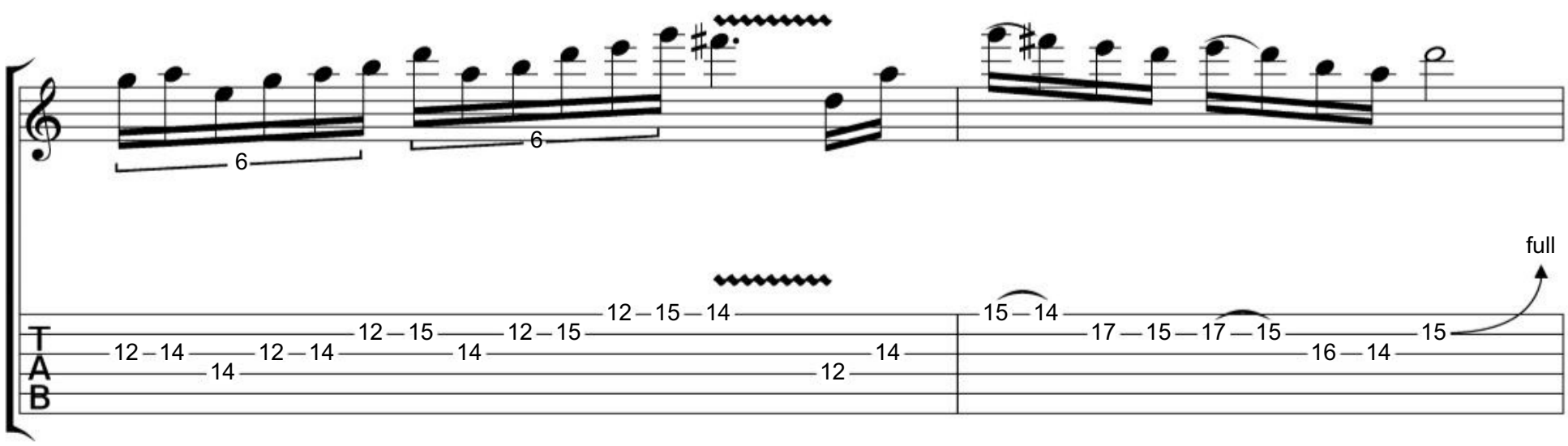
LICK 1

One thing that always stands out in Bonamassa's playing style is his unusual grouping of notes in scale patterns. This comes from his love of Eric Johnson. This cascading descending lick runs down an E minor pentatonic scale in two positions but notice that it's grouped into five notes per beat. This lends the lick a cascading, almost progressive feel.



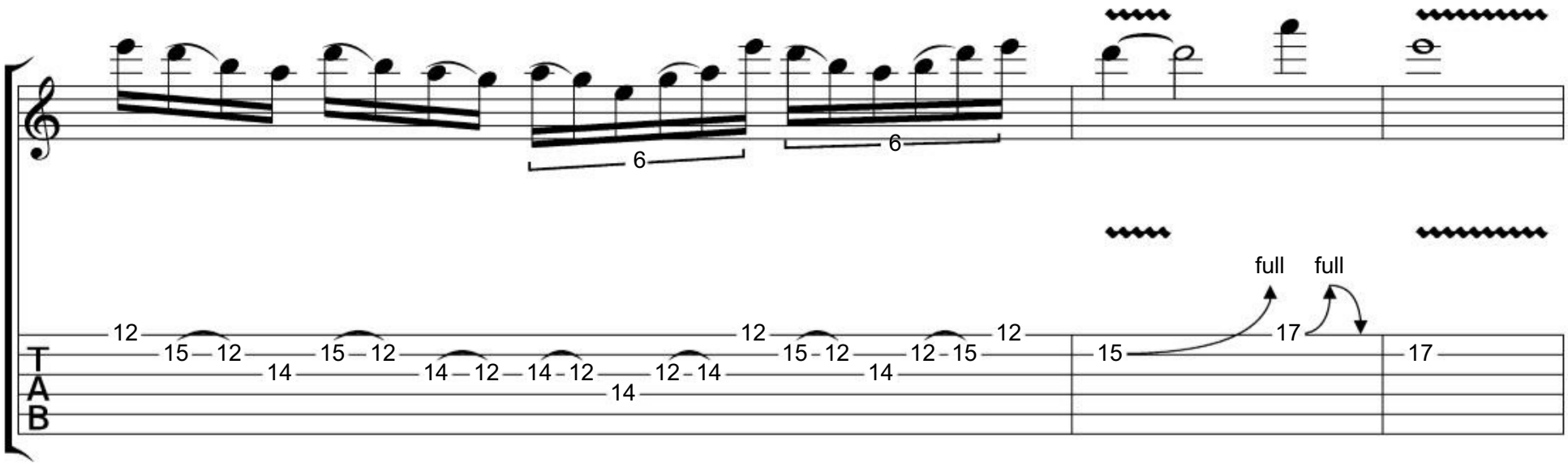
LICK 2

On the subject of grouping notes, this example is based around a speedy pair of ascending sextuplets (six on the beat). Even though the official timing is grouped in sixes, there are elements of the previous lick here, with some patterns seemingly grouped in fives. The second half of the lick shifts to the second pentatonic shape with some intervallic skips before a descending run.



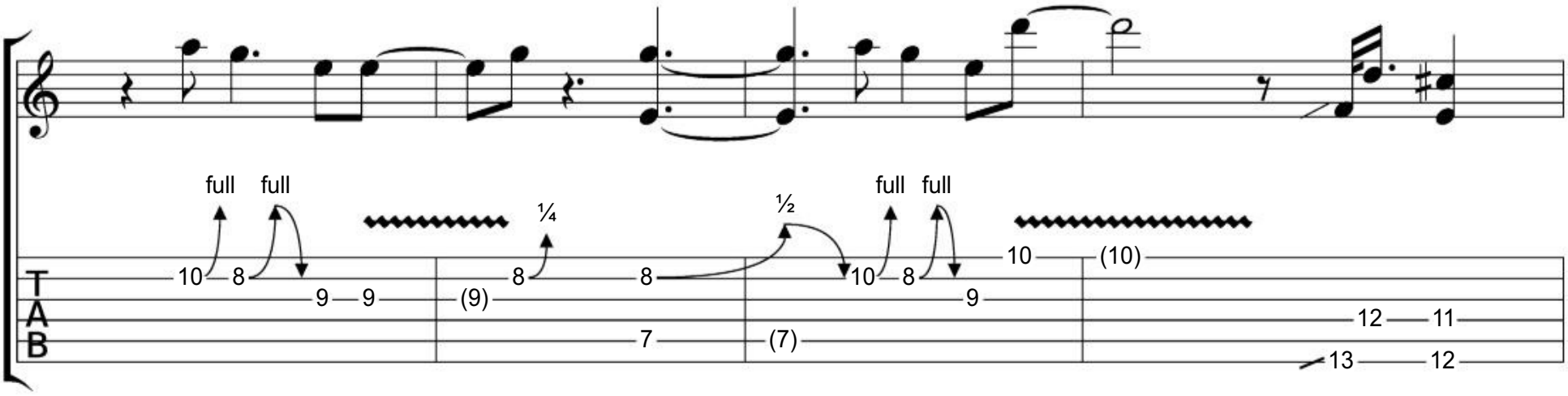
LICK 3

As well as grouping things in uncommon subdivisions, Bonamassa is also known to switch subdivisions in the middle of lead lines. This example begins with descending sixteenth notes across the first two beats before switching into ascending sextuplets across the third and fourth beats.



LICK 4

This lick uses the fourth pentatonic shape in E minor and showcases Bonamassa's outside-the-box approach to guitar. Begin on the second beat, a technique borrowed by Joe from many of his personal guitar heroes. Pay attention to the end of bars two and four. The end of the second bar features a pair of notes split between the A and B strings. It starts as an outline of an E minor chord but you bend the minor third up to the major third. The end of the final bar features a pair of major sixths, which creates an interesting resolve instead of conventional powerchords.



TRY IT YOURSELF

Joe's fiery blues style will likely require a lot of practise to master at full speed, so don't rush things. Focus on absorbing the concepts by learning these licks cleanly and fluidly at a slow pace, then gradually build up speed until you're blazing up the fretboard! Visit *Guitar.com* for audio examples.

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CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE PAUL McCARTNEY

WORDS ROD FOGG

Continuing our look at the chord shapes and sequences favoured by The Beatles, we get in the head of Paul McCartney and find a songwriting genius with a penchant for minor chords and those from outside the key

Many of the 1950s groups whose music inspired The Beatles used harmonies based on stock chord progressions, such as I-VI-IV-V, (G, Em, C, D), which can be found in many songs. Lennon and McCartney, however, had a curious instinct for rearranging these chords in interesting and original ways.

In McCartney's songwriting, minor chords occur far more frequently than might be expected, bearing in mind that The Beatles' other core influence was 1950s US rhythm and blues. Enjoy experimenting with these chord sequences and we'll be back next month with more McCartney-inspired harmony.

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com

FIGURE 1

Many early Beatles songs rely on strummed acoustic guitars for their rhythm parts and use the basic open-string chords that most guitarists learn when first starting out. In this first example, play the first four chords as written and perhaps fit an extra bar in by returning to the A chord following the B minor. Experiment by playing these chords in a different order but end by playing B♭, C and D. Notice how out-there the B♭ chord seems in this context? That's because, along with the C chord, it's outside the D major harmony that the other chords emphasise. Normality is restored as we climb up through C to return to D major, this time at the fifth fret.

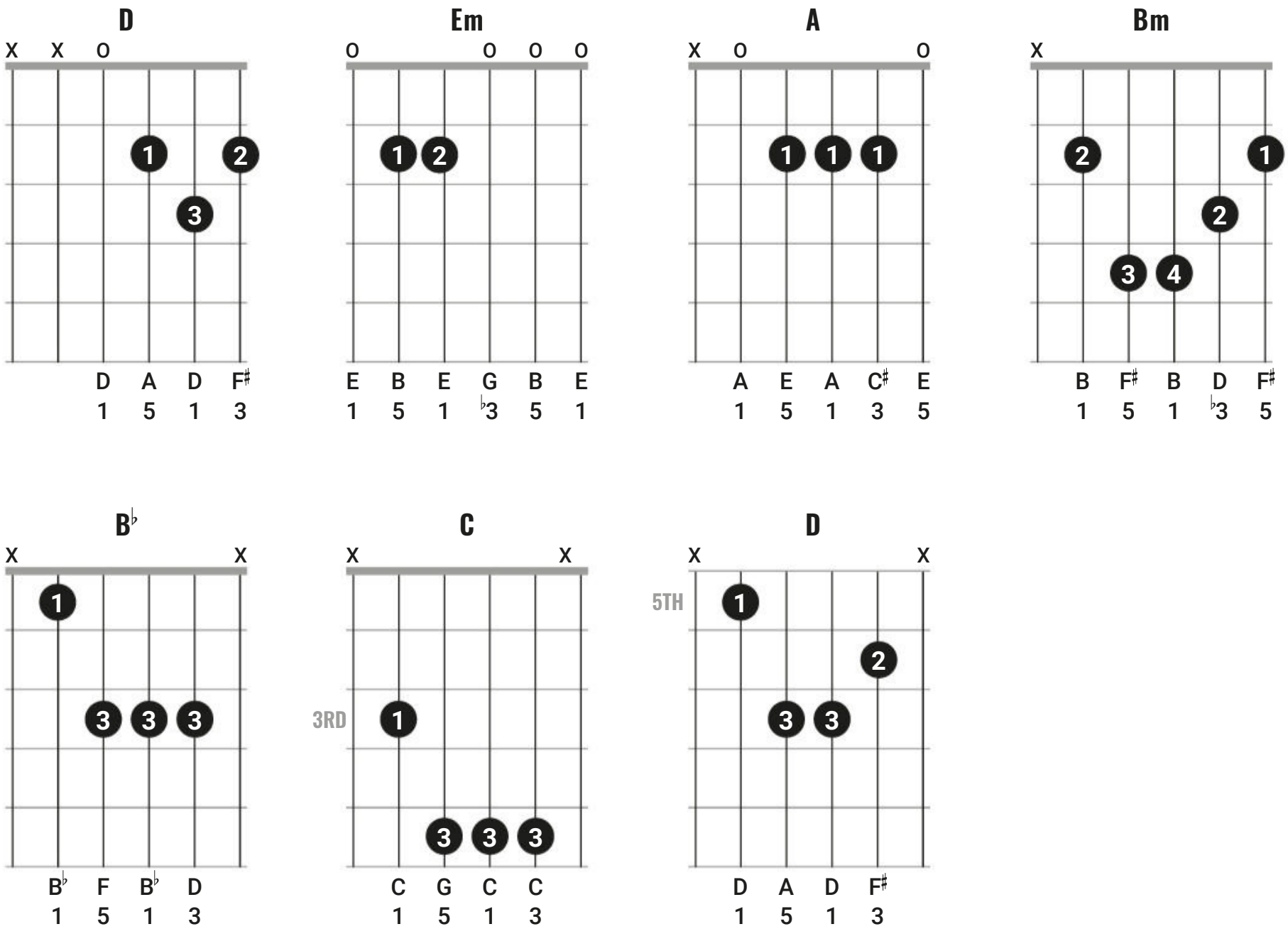


FIGURE 2

Here, we're in the key of F major. You can put together a verse by switching back and forth between the F and B♭ chords. You could try adding G and C chords into the mix as well, then play these four chords in the order they're written. You should hear the classic climb as F7 pushes towards B♭ and B♭ minor. If you're relatively new to guitar, barre chords such as these can be a challenge, especially on an acoustic. Concentrate on keeping your index finger flat instead of pulling with your arm.

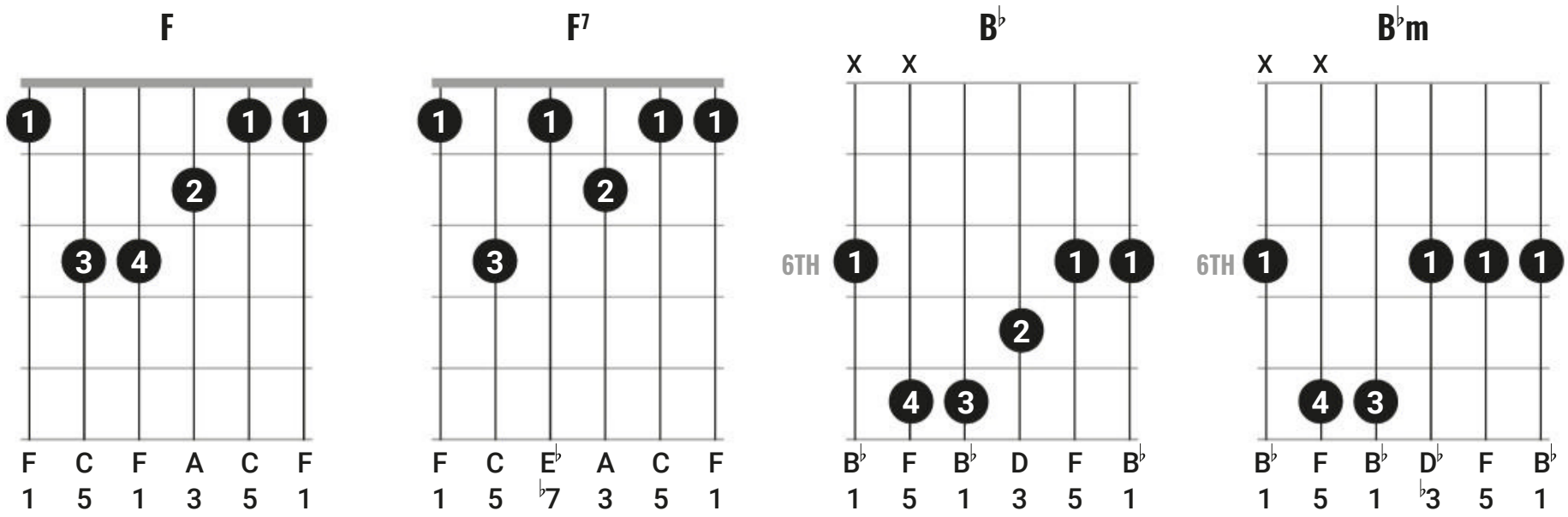


FIGURE 3

Paul McCartney loves minor chords but he also enjoys ambiguous introductions that leave you wondering what key the music is going to be in, together with unusual structures and avoiding the usual four or eight-bar phrases. Play these chords as written or repeat the E minor and A minor to make a six-bar phrase. Is it in the key of E minor? Is it in G? Try C major as the next chord and make up a verse using C, F and G chords.

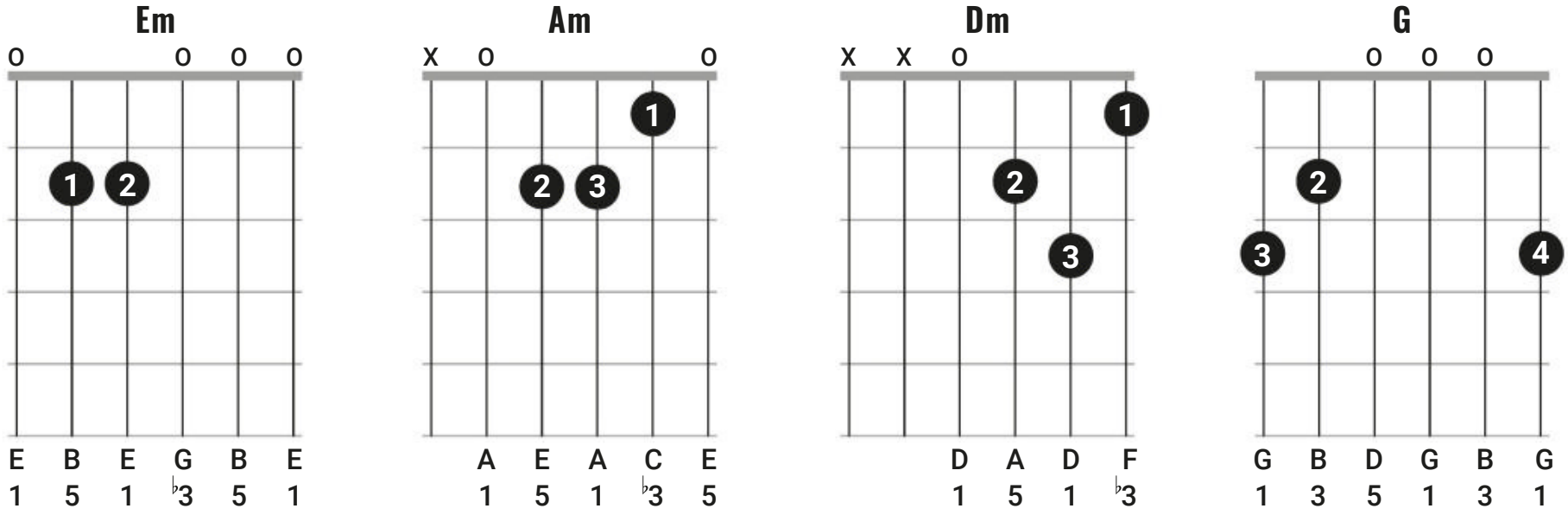
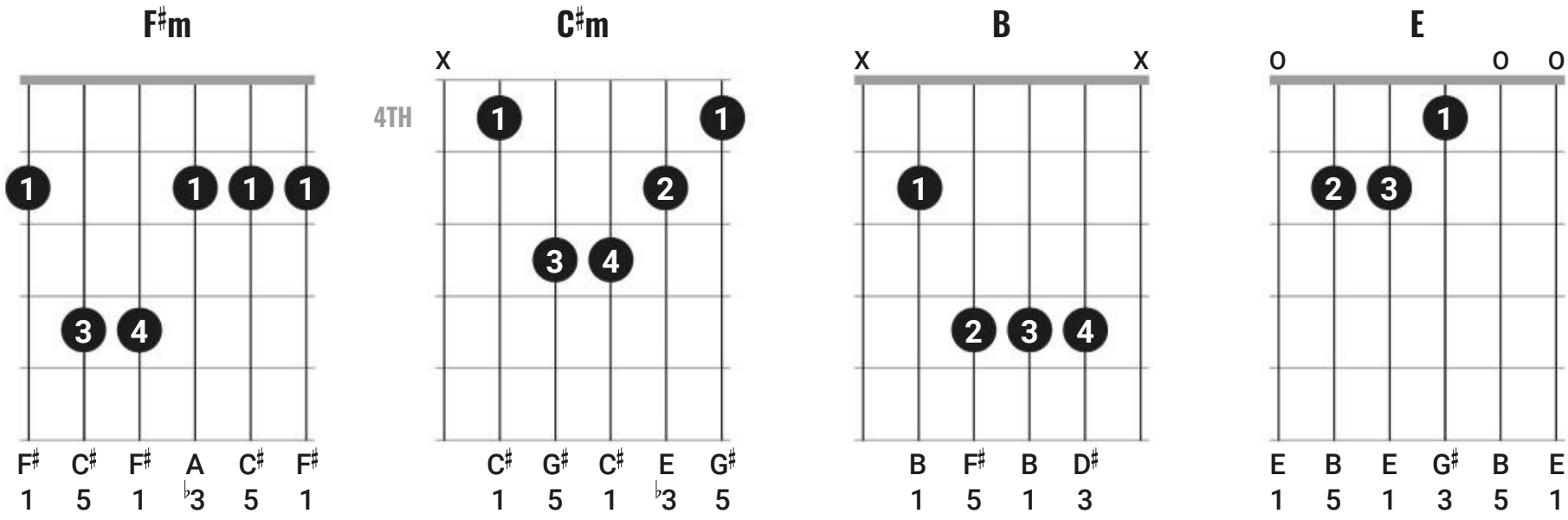
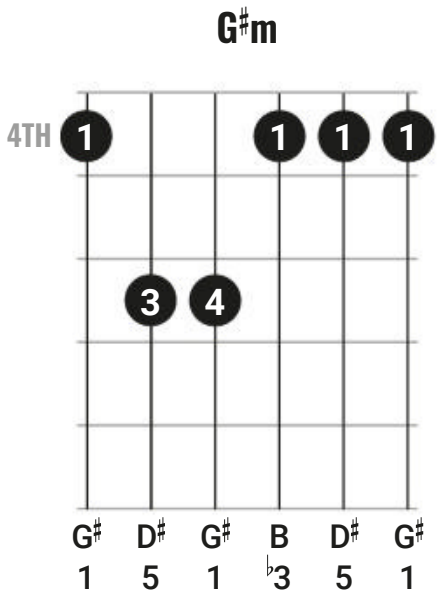
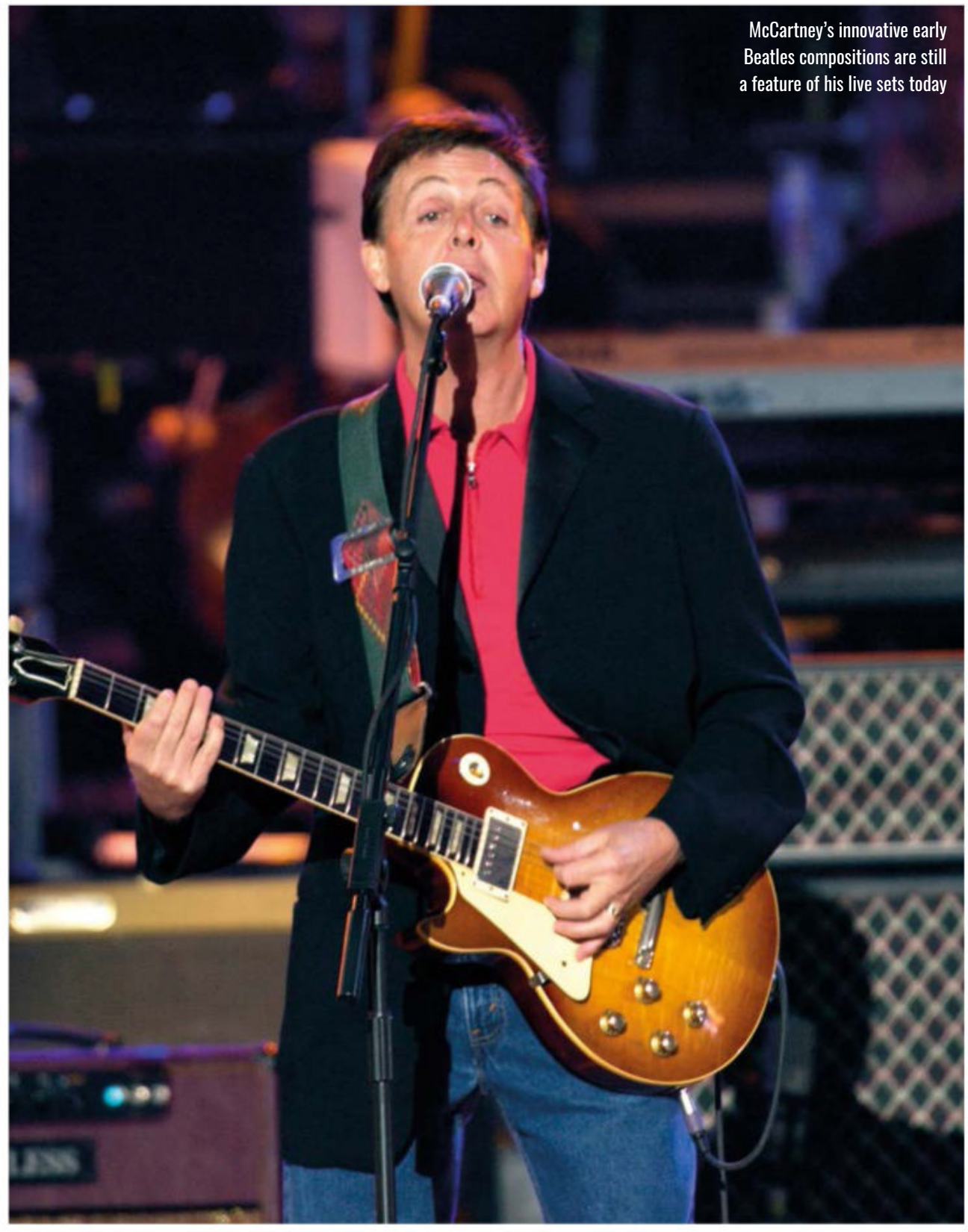


FIGURE 4

Here, we're switching backwards and forwards between F♯ minor and C♯ minor before progressing to B and E. Don't worry if it comes out as a 10-bar phrase, as that's not unusual for McCartney. You could also try dropping an A chord in just before the B major. If you're not already impressed with the originality of this kind of chord sequence, try making up a second section using the G♯ minor, C♯ minor and B chords. It sounds easy and natural but it's not until you arrive on the E major that the key of the music becomes apparent. That's evidence of a truly original songwriter at work.







McCartney's innovative early Beatles compositions are still a feature of his live sets today

© Tim Graham / Getty Images

TALKBOX

HARRY SHEARER

INTERVIEW JOSH GARDNER

The Spinal Tap and Simpsons legend on slinky basses, putting the beat in *Beat It* and being trapped inside Derek Smalls while a billion people watch it all go wrong

The moment it all started...

"I had studied classical piano for most of my childhood and early teens, and thereby was forced to learn to read music – and I couldn't think of anything I wanted to do less than read music! So when I hit university age, I bought a 3/4-sized Japanese plywood bass and started doing what I always did with piano when my teacher wasn't looking: playing by ear! My ear had always been drawn to bass notes and it was just something I felt comfortable with, and as opposed to the finger-shredding little strings on guitar, the nice big fat strings on bass were just fine with me."

I couldn't live without my...

"I play both upright and electric bass, and of my three uprights, there's one that is just my absolute favourite. The great British bassist Danny Thompson guided me to a shop up near Watford and picked out an Italian-made bass for me that he thought I'd like and it's just a *dream* to play. So that's probably my favourite bass in the world."

The one that got away...

"I've been fortunate enough in my life that I haven't had to sell stuff. I've been a collector with almost everything, not a distributor. That goes for records too. I've never got rid of an LP – still have 'em all. And I've kept basses, both shitty and good. Thankfully, I have a storage locker, so I don't have to be surrounded by all of them.

My signature model...

"There's a company here in Los Angeles, Schecter Guitar Research, and before I went on the Derek Smalls tour a couple of years ago, I went over there and they let me plough through the whole range and I found one in the Diamond Series that I really love. It's my favourite electric bass to play. I don't have to coax it, it's right there."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"Hmm, I don't actually recall anyone giving me any advice [laughs]. I wish someone had given me some decent advice – I could have avoided some shit! I've gone through life advice-less. Maybe a couple of people have advised me not to eat something but I don't think that's what you're looking for. It was good advice but very limited in scope."

My Spinal Tap moment...

"Spinal Tap had been invited to perform at the Freddie Mercury Memorial Concert at Wembley Stadium. We had a song on our second record called *The Majesty Of Rock*, and we were going to come on stage wearing ridiculous pompous ermine robes, doff the robes, Nigel hits a powerchord and we start the song. So we get on stage, doff our ermine robes to big fanfare and Nigel hits the powerchord – and no sound comes out. 90,000 people in the stands and a billion people watching at home on live TV. We're looking around and it becomes apparent after a moment that the stage crew thinks this is our joke – and it's not!

"We can't figure out how to break character and say, 'No, no, no, this isn't our joke, c'mon, help'. So we're stuck out there being these guys. Finally somebody on our crew twigs what's going on and rushes to fix it. Someone had obviously unplugged or otherwise unpowered Nigel's amp. You go through something like that and it feels like about 25 years. I've gone and looked at the tape since and, y'know, it was probably about 30 seconds. But it felt like a millennium up there, precisely because everything we had worked for was to disappear into these characters, and now we couldn't get out of them!"

My guilty pleasure...

"I got a lesson about this very early on when I was in a comedy group and a fan came up to me and said, 'You guys are my favourite comedy group – you and Cheech & Chong'. And I thought Cheech & Chong were kind of trash. So there I was saying thank you through clenched teeth and then I thought, 'Wait a minute, there's plenty of shitty music that I like'. But that's the big mistake that executives make in show business. – they think people like shit so they can't possibly, therefore, like good. And that lesson to me was, 'Of course they can' – and they don't even have to make the distinction! And so I don't feel guilty about anything I like."

The most important thing on my rider...

"I'm very simple: a banana and some sparkling water. That's it. Banana for energy, sparkling water for moisture!"

If I could just play one thing...

"I've learnt two bass parts of Snarky Puppy songs but that's as close as I can get to playing anything resembling jazz. I just don't have the chops for it. I'd have to practise to get that kind of technique, so I feel quite proud that I managed to get two of Michael League's bass parts under my belt!"

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THE BEST GETS BETTER: FLYBY ULTRA BACKPACK

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